United Nations S/PV.8010

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8010th meeting
Monday, 24 July 2017, 10.05 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Michon
	Italy	Mr. Biagini
	Japan	Mr. Akahori
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-22669 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2017/11.

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8011

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8011th meeting
Tuesday, 25 July 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tileuberdi
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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17-22872 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Her Excellency Mrs. María Rubiales de Chamorro, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose also that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: As we meet today to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the risks of escalation and violence in the region continue to increase, despite the emergence of newfound agreement among a number of countries of the need to stand united against terrorism and radicalism. As societies continue to fracture along ethnic or religious lines and non-State actors continue to control large swathes of territory, recent events in Jerusalem resonate across the Middle East. For nearly a century, despite myriad peace efforts, one conflict has evaded solution. Some say it is irresolvable. Others challenge the basic premise of international consensus on how it can be resolved. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not only about land and peace; it is about two peoples who both have legitimate national aspirations for statehood and recognition — two nations whose histories are intertwined and whose future is forever intricately linked.

Fortunately until now, Israelis and Palestinians have not succumbed to the torrent of violent upheaval that has engulfed the region in recent years. But half a century of occupation has produced tens of thousands of casualties and left deep psychological scars on both sides. Developments over the past 11 days at the holy sites of the Old City in Jerusalem, however, have demonstrated the grave risk of dangerous escalation that exists, a risk of turning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a religious one and dragging both sides into the vortex of violence along with the rest of the region.

On 14 July, two Israeli policemen were killed by three assailants at the Lion's Gate entrance to the Holy Esplanade. The attackers fled inside the compound before being shot by police. According to the Israeli authorities, the assailants had initiated the attack from within the compound. In the immediate aftermath, the Palestinian President condemned the attack, while the Israeli Prime Minister committed to upholding and respecting the status quo at the holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem. Citing security concerns, the Israeli authorities closed the compound to all — including, for the first time since 1969, to Muslims for Friday prayers — and restricted entrance to the Old City in order to secure the area of the attack, search for further threats and conduct an investigation.

Two days later, on Sunday, 16 July, the compound was reopened, first for Muslim worshippers and later

for visitors, with metal detectors placed outside its entrances. The Islamic Waqf immediately rejected that move as a change in the status quo and called on worshippers not to enter the compound through the metal detectors, but to pray outside the entrance and in the streets of Jerusalem. Palestinian factions also immediately rejected the security measures. Hamas and Islamic Jihad issued a joint statement warning that that was a red line that would lead to an escalation, and Fatah called for "a day of rage".

Starting on 16 July, prayers and peaceful protests were conducted at the Lion's Gate, followed by clashes with the Israeli police. Tensions rose by Friday, 21 July, as the Waqf announced the closure of all Jerusalem mosques for Friday prayers. In response, Israel announced a restriction of entry into the Old City for all Muslim men under the age of 50. Clashes that evening and the next turned fatal, with four Palestinian protesters killed and hundreds injured. Later on Friday, three Israelis were killed in a brutal terror attack at their home in the West Bank settlement of Halamish by a 19-year-old Palestinian assailant who in his last will made a clear connection between his act and the events in East Jerusalem. Overall, in clashes since 14 July, at least four Palestinians were killed and more than 300 have been injured.

I ask Member States today to unequivocally condemn the violence of the past few days. Our thoughts and prayers must go out to all the victims and their families.

On 21 July, President Abbas announced that the Palestinian Authority was freezing all contact with Israel, including high-level security coordination.

Let us make no mistake: while events in Jerusalem may be taking place over a couple of hundred square metres in the Old City, they affect hundreds of millions of people around the world. Therefore, I welcome last night's decision by the Israeli security Cabinet to remove the metal detectors, while ensuring the security of visitors and worshippers to the holy sites. I hope that the Cabinet decision will lead to a calming of the current tensions and will enable a return of worshippers to the Holy Esplanade. It is expected that President Abbas will convene the Palestinian leadership later tonight to discuss those developments.

As we have seen over the past 11 days, it is vital that the status quo established since 1967 be preserved. Recognizing the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom, I encourage Israel to continue its intensive contacts with Jordan. All parties must refrain from provocative actions, show restraint and bring a conclusive end to this crisis in the next few days. In those efforts, constant discussion with the Islamic religious authorities in Jerusalem and the Palestinian leadership can greatly contribute to maintaining calm in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied West Bank.

As this crisis has unfolded, I want to reflect briefly on the views we hear from residents in East Jerusalem — people who have been caught in the midst of these events over the past few weeks. They often tell us that for many years they have felt that their religious and ethnic identity is under threat; that their very livelihoods in their own city are at risk while living under occupation; and that their children often live in fear of security operations and house demolitions. They want to pray in peace and live in security and freedom. Many of them feel alone. They talk of the special status that resolution 181 (1947) had bestowed on Jerusalem, yet they see the reality around them. That is why often they come to us, the United Nations, appealing for protection. It is critical that any decision made at the highest political and religious levels, if it is to be sustainable, take into consideration the fears and hopes of the people on the ground.

Jerusalem remains a final-status issue that needs to be decided and negotiated between the two sides.

As the occupying Power, Israel has a responsibility to uphold its obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and must show maximum restraint in order to avoid further loss of life and an escalation of the situation.

At the same time, Palestinian leaders have a responsibility to avoid provocative statements that further aggravate an already tense environment. In that respect, I am particularly concerned about statements made over the past weeks by some factions that have sought to fan the flames of violence. Such provocations are dangerous, and I call on all to condemn them.

This crisis has diverted us from the real tasks ahead, namely, how to restore a political process in order to find a solution that meets the legitimate national aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians — a solution that is based on United Nations resolutions and is achieved through negotiations; a solution whose ultimate goal is two States living side by side in peace and security.

Unfortunately, these latest incidents have taken place against a backdrop of other developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In July alone, plans were advanced for more than 2,300 housing units in East Jerusalem, which is 30 per cent more than were advanced during all of 2016. That includes plans for approximately 1,600 units expanding a ring of settlements in north of East Jerusalem, as well as plans in Sheikh Jarrah, which may involve the demolition of Palestinian houses. I must once again emphasize that settlement activity in occupied territory is illegal under international law and undermines the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestine.

On a more positive note, some constructive steps have been taken that are in line with the recommendations of the report of the Middle East Quartet (S/2016/595, annex).

On 10 July, an interim power-purchasing agreement was signed, energizing the first Palestinian-owned and operated substation in Jenin. That will increase electricity supply in the northern West Bank and help the Palestinian Authority take control of the energy sector. Both sides should now move to negotiate a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian power-purchasing agreement that would be a landmark achievement towards Palestine's energy independence.

On 13 July, with United States facilitation, the Palestinian Authority and Israeli Government reached an agreement allowing for an increase in water supply for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Under its terms, the Palestinian Authority will purchase some 32 million cubic meters of water from Israel — 22 million cubic meters for the West Bank and 10 million for Gaza. The water will come from a desalination plant to be constructed in Aqaba, Jordan. The implementation of such agreements is instrumental in rebuilding trust between Palestinians and Israelis. They are, however, all put at risk by the freezing of contacts between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Without a resolution to the current crisis, these hard-won gains will swiftly evaporate.

I now turn to the situation in Gaza with a heavy heart. Some 2 million people there have been taken hostage in the political standoff between Fatah and Hamas. The humanitarian impact of the punishing measures taken against Gaza is appalling. In some parts of Gaza, people have experienced electricity cuts of 36 hours. No electricity means no drinking water. Hospitals are struggling to survive. An environmental crisis is in the making. Whatever the political differences between the Palestinian factions, it is not the people of Gaza who should be paying the price.

I want to assure the Security Council that the United Nations will not give up on Gaza and its people. Despite the odds, we will continue our intense mediation efforts to resolve the standoff. I take this opportunity to thank Egypt for stepping in at a moment of need and facilitating the entry of badly needed fuel to increase electricity supply. Egyptian fuel, along with the nearly 900,000 liters of fuel per month provided by the United Nations for the most essential services, provide a temporary lifeline to the residents of Gaza. In this environment, the continued functioning of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism is more critical than ever to the people of Gaza. Recently, too, the State of Qatar has signed contracts for eight more residential buildings as part of its commitment to reconstruction.

Today, Gaza and the West Bank are further apart than ever. Palestinian leaders must make some hard choices about the future of their people. They can work to overcome their ideological divisions or they can continue along the path that will guarantee Gaza's complete collapse. They can work to unite Palestinians in pursuit of the goal of statehood or they can oversee the demise of the Palestinian national project. They can resolve the current crisis in Gaza or preside over the radicalization of their population and see it fall into the hands of extremists with ever more destructive agendas.

I know that this is not the future that President Abbas or the majority of Palestinians want for their country. I know that they want to build a State in which human rights are respected; a State that is achieved on the basis of negotiations, not violence; one that lives in peace and security with the State of Israel. For 10 years, however, the population in Gaza has lived in a state of chronic vulnerability. At what point will people say "enough is enough"? At what point will we say "enough is enough"?

Since violently seizing control of Gaza, Hamas has tightened its grip on power and suppressed dissent. The fact that no presidential or legislative elections have been held in Palestine since 2006 has also created a democratic deficit that undermines the legitimacy of institutions. Two different legal systems have emerged

and diverging laws have been enacted in Gaza and the West Bank.

I once again call on all Palestinian leaders to address the destructive consequences of the split. I encourage them to reach an agreement that would allow the legitimate Palestinian Government to take up its responsibilities in Gaza as a step towards the formation of a unity Government on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform, and agree to hold elections. Meanwhile, Hamas must ensure that calm is mai tained by ceasing militant build-up against Israel and by maintaining security at the border of Egypt. At the same time, I encourage Israel to step up its measures to lift the closures and facilitate development in Gaza as overall calm persists in the Strip, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Turning very briefly to Lebanon, I should like only to refer to the briefing a few days ago by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, who briefed the Council in detail on developments and risks under resolution 1701 (2006).

Meanwhile, I also want to note that the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic has been maintained, albeit in a volatile environment. I am alarmed by the recent spike in military activities in Syria, which has resulted in several spill-over fire incidents across the disengagement line and Israeli retaliatory actions. I join the Secretary-General in welcoming the announcement by the Governments of Jordan, the Russian Federation and the United States of a de-escalation zone and arrangements to support a ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian assistance in south-western Syria.

In closing, let me emphasize that the events we have witnessed over the past weeks in Jerusalem are a reminder of how easy it is to reach the precipice of a dangerous escalation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We are not over the crisis yet, but I hope that the steps that have been taken by Israel will enable a return to relative calm in the next couple of days. I hope that as agreements between Israel and Jordan are implemented and a positive engagement with the religious authorities takes places, we will avoid a cycle of violence that would destroy all peace efforts for the foreseeable future.

We must not lose focus on the need to restore a political perspective or on the need to bring Palestinians and Israelis back into an environment that is conducive to negotiations on a final status arrangement and avoids turning the national Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a religious one.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, I congratulate you on your assumption of the Security Council presidency this month, confident of China's skilled leadership and guidance of the Council's important work. I also wish to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing to the Council this morning.

Before proceeding, we also renew our deep appreciation to Bolivia for its wise leadership of the Security Council in June, including its convening on 20 June of the meeting of the Council (see S/PV.7977) to sombrely mark and reflect on the fiftieth year of Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967. As reflected in the statements made by Council members that day, the international consensus is firm and clear that the two-State solution, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, remains the central pillar of a just, comprehensive and peaceful solution based on the relevant resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Also clear are the responsibilities of the Council under the Charter of the United Nations to act to advance a solution to the conflict, which continues to impact international peace and security. And yet, we continue to face the tragic consequences of the illegal occupation and the rapid deterioration on all fronts, and the absence of a credible political horizon to end the occupation, end this injustice and realize the Palestinian people's rights, including to self-determination.

We come before the Council today amid escalating tensions and instability in our homeland and a profound sense of worry. The fragile situation in occupied East Jerusalem has been inflamed yet again as Israel, the occupying Power, presses forth with its reckless and destructive agenda against our people and holy sites, especially Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which houses the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, in absolute contempt for international law and the will of the international community. The

situation that we have repeatedly warned against — the stoking of a religious conflict — is rapidly unfolding as Israel persists with its illegal actions in occupied East Jerusalem, including its aggressive behaviour and provocative violations of the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, aggravating religious sensitivities to the point of eruption. We are clearly at the tipping point. We must therefore again warn against the dangers of such provocations and incitement and the fueling of yet another cycle of violence, which will surely have far-reaching consequences in this already volatile climate.

We condemn the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israel and all other related provocative and inflammatory measures and we do not accept, under any circumstances or pretexts, the closure of that holy site to worshippers. At this time, occupied East Jerusalem is a city besieged from within and without by military checkpoints, occupation forces, settlements and armed and violent settlers. The Palestinian people in the city face negation, subjugation, discrimination, armed demolitions and violence, with the aim of forcibly transferring them out of their city. Israel openly and shamelessly pursues discriminatory plans and policies based on religious and national affiliation.

The Palestinian people are resisting the recent provocative measures, including the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the banning of the Friday prayers and restrictions and access to the holy sites by praying in the streets. They are peacefully — and I emphasize peacefully — expressing their rejection of the illegal measures against their rights and their holy sites. Yet, peaceful demonstrations and steadfastness in preserving the character and identity of the city are being met with violent repression. Such aggression, provocations and violations must be immediately halted in order to avert the complete destabilization and collapse of the situation.

We recognize the efforts undertaken thus far by concerned parties in the region and across the international community to de-escalate the situation in Jerusalem and affirm the Palestinian leadership's readiness to cooperate with such efforts. In that context, we recognize the important role and supervision of the Islamic Waqf at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the first kibla and the third holiest site in Islam, and recall the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in the city. Yet, Israel continues to ignore the international community. A clear unified message must be conveyed to Israel to cease and reverse all such illegal actions and policies. Furthermore, explicit calls must be made for an end to Israeli incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, including by Government officials, regarding the city and the holy sites, such as remarks by Israel's Public Security Minister who brazenly declared that:

> "Israel holds sovereignty over the Mount, no matter what other countries' positions are, and if we decide that a certain move has a certain advantage, then it is carried out".

Such declarations are aimed at illegally asserting Israeli control over Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the heart of occupied East Jerusalem, which remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. De-escalation is urgent. We appeal for the continuation of all efforts to restore the historic status quo at Al-Haram mosque compound and achieve calm. That requires the lifting of all measures in violation of the historic status quo, including any hindrances or obstructions violating the access by Palestinians to that holy site and their freedom of worship. We recall the Council's press statement (SC/12052) of 17 September 2015, in which it was underscored that

> "Muslim worshippers at the Haram al-Sharif must be allowed to worship in peace, free from violence, threats and provocations".

We also recall the numerous relevant Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967 to the present day, the most recent being resolution 2334 (2016), which explicitly underlined the non-recognition of any changes to 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations. We call for the full respect and implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council has not only the power to enact the law, but a duty to uphold it. Its credibility and authority in this case and all cases depend on it. The question of Palestine cannot remain the exception to every rule.

The de-escalation of this perilous situation is contingent on respect for the law, including as enshrined in the relevant resolutions and that, in turn, is what will preserve the sanctity of the holy sites and preserve fleeting prospects for peace. The protection of human life is equally urgent. The protection of civilian Palestinians in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem is very urgent and important. International

humanitarian law and human rights law must be respected, without exception. We deplore the killing and injury of all innocent civilians. I repeat, we deplore the killing and injury of all innocent civilians, including innocent Palestinian civilians.

Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable for its violations and negligence, including with regard to the terror inflicted by its settlers on the Palestinian civilians under its occupation; it cannot continue to be absolved of its legal obligations. We mourn the loss of five of our youth, who were brutally killed last week by the occupying forces, and pray for the recovery of the more than 1,000 peaceful demonstrators who were injured. In that connection, we commend the European Union, the Secretary-General and others who have asked for investigations into such crimes. We also deplore Israel's ongoing military raids and arrest of Palestinian civilians, including children, adding to the thousands of Palestinians unlawfully imprisoned and abused by the occupation.

We must remind the members in the Chamber that the Palestinian people are an unarmed, defenceless people. We must also remind members that Israel is the occupying Power and is not the sovereign in any part of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and cannot be permitted in any way to act as sovereign, whether in practice, policy or rhetoric. This occupation, entrenched and sustained by Israel's illegal policies and practices over the decades, is the context and harsh reality in which all of these disturbing developments are taking place. And all of it is happening against the backdrop of the Council's adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) — a resolution that was unequivocal as to the occupied status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967 and the illegality of all measures aimed at altering the demography, character and status of that territory.

Resolution 2334 (2016) determined a clear path away from conflict and towards peace. We must not allow the occupying Power to continue dragging us in the opposite direction. In the absence of serious steps to implement resolution 2334 (2016), and in the absence of any consequences for Israel's flagrant disrespect of the resolution, the occupying Power has not only persisted with its violations — committing thousands since the resolution's adoption — but has also been encouraged and emboldened to accelerate its reckless colonization and annexation campaign.

The occupying Power's actions continue to endanger Palestinian civilians' lives and risk further destabilizing the situation on the ground, with potentially dramatic consequences for Palestinians and Israelis, for the region and the prospects for peace and security. We should not underestimate the risks. Despair, anger and tensions throughout Palestine are running extremely high, especially among our young people, who have not known a single day of freedom or dignity under this abhorrent occupation.

An hour from Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied West Bank, 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip remain under Israel's illegal blockade in an act of massive collective punishment. For a decade, an entire population has been imprisoned — denied freedom of movement and access to livelihoods, basic supplies and even vital medicines; deprived of clean water an energy and forced to live in the ruins of war, even as reconstruction continues to be obstructed and at least 40,000 people remain displaced. That is the reality of their lives. This man-made catastrophe is deepening by the hour and requires urgent remedy through humanitarian, humane and political solutions. Gaza is unlivable for humans. That does not mean a decade from now, or even a few years or months. It is unlivable now, as we speak. While Palestinian unity is vital and a priority that we are working very hard to accomplish, only an end to the Israeli blockade can bring life back to Gaza. We therefore appeal once again for immediate action to save its Palestinian civilian population from this inhumanity and avert another explosive crisis.

Seventy years after the United Nations was first seized of the question of Palestine, the denial of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination still continues. How many Palestinian generations will have to endure the suffering caused by their persistent dispossession and exile and by the colonial and military Israeli occupation in all its manifestations? How many more years and decades do we have to wait? Here before the Council, I have to say that if affirming and defending the Palestinian people's rights is equated with being anti-Israel, the logical conclusion is that only a negation of Palestinian rights can be considered pro-Israel. That is not just offensive and unacceptable; it constitutes an existential matter for the Palestinian people. Moreover, it implies that a just peace — or a that recognizes the legitimate national aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people — is not possible and that somehow our collective pursuit of peace is

anti-Israel. We reject that equation and continue to believe that peace is possible, not by negating our rights but rather by ending the Israeli occupation of our land, securing Palestinian rights — including the right to self-determination and freedom — and ensuring a just settlement for Palestinian refugees, in conformity with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Palestinian leadership will continue to engage positively with every peace effort. We say that even at a time of great pain and turmoil for our people and our land, for we firmly believe that the path of peace and international legitimacy will rectify this grave injustice and ensure that one day the Palestinian people will live in dignity, freedom and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with Israel and all of its other neighbours, in peace and security within recognized borders. We appeal to the Council and all those present to uphold its role and responsibilities under the Charter in this urgent hour. We need the Council, and we need it to act.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Last Friday, a disgusting act of terror took place in my country. The Salomon family had gathered together for the traditional Friday-night Shabbat meal. They came together to celebrate a joyous occasion, the birth of a new grandson. But it was only a matter of time before the family's festivities ended in horrific bloodshed. A Palestinian terrorist broke into their home. He murdered Yosef, the 70-year-old grandfather of the family, and Yosef's daughter Haya and son Elad. That terrorist slayed those innocents in cold blood before the eyes of the children and grandchildren. This family, including the youngest children, had to witness their loved ones bleed to death at the hands of terror. Had it not been for Elad's wife, the horrific attack would have taken the lives of the entire extended Salomon family. She hid the children while a brave neighbour who heard the victims' screams neutralized the terrorist before he could complete his massacre.

We cannot continue to ignore the basis for this ghastly assault. The attack did not happen in a vacuum. No, that terrorist committed a heinous crime following rampant, relentless incitements to violence by Palestinian officials. The Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, has publicly endorsed the practice of paying salaries to convicted terrorists and their families. Schools are named for mass murderers. Monuments dedicated to these killers stand at the centres of Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinians in Gaza even celebrated Friday's horrific events. The result is clear. Palestinians are radicalized and encouraged to kill innocent Israelis in cold blood. It is no secret that they have built an industry of incitement. How many more innocents will be murdered? How many more terrorists will be paid to kill? And how many thousands of dollars will be awarded to the Salomons' killer? This incitement, culture of hate and glorification of terror must end now.

We are assembled in this forum to examine the situation in the Middle East. So let us examine the real situation. The core of so much violence in our region and around the world comes from the unrelenting glorification of terror. We cannot continue to sideline the truth. Friday's unspeakable atrocity was not an isolated incident. This kind of encouragement to terror has been going on for decades. The Palestinians will not admit it. They make up excuses and divert attention from the truth. They have just claimed that Israel is seeking to change the status quo on the Temple Mount and that that is what prompted the violence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel's top priority is to maintain the safety and security of all Temple Mount worshippers and visitors. The Palestinians' top priority is to ignite violence.

Let me go back to 4 October 2003. Jews and Arabs were gathered together in Haifa's famous Maxim restaurant. Maxim was seen across the world as a symbol of coexistence, brotherhood and peace. While enjoying a family lunch, no one suspected the impending violence. On that October day, Hanadi Jaradat, a female Palestinian student from Jenin, disguised herself as a pregnant woman. Jaradat walked into the restaurant with one twisted intention in mind: to blow herself up and kill as many innocent people as possible. In cold blood, Jaradat took the lives of 21 Jews and Arabs and badly injured 51 others. Dead customers were still sitting upright in their chairs, with blood spilling from their bodies. Babies and young children were propelled across the room from the force of the blast. No plight or struggle can justify such disgusting acts of terror. No claim of victimhood can validate the cruelty and the insanity of such sick crimes.

Terror has many untold victims. Oran Almog is one of them. While only 10-years-old, Oran lost his father, grandfather, grandmother, brother and cousin because of Hanadi Jaradat. Oran was badly burned and blinded. Oran is here with us today.

Hanadi Jaradat's family — the family of the killer — has earned tens of thousands of dollars in payments for her crime. Jaradat's two accomplices have earned more than $500,000 in total terror payments, and those sums are only increasing. The more prison days, the higher the terror wage. Jaradat's father declined all condolences and called his daughter a "gift". What a gift indeed. Jaradat's family earned a blank check for her suicide. In October 2012, the Arab Lawyers' Union awarded its top prize to that terrorist. The Union even sent a delegation to her family to present them with the award.

Professional women in Israel, like in many of the other members' countries, win awards in the arts, sciences and business. Professional Palestinian women win awards for murder. As Israeli women become chief executive officers, Palestinian women like Hanadi Jaradat become chief executive killers. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is just as guilty as the terror groups themselves. Abbas not only has the audacity to claim that he seeks peace, but actively funds, promotes and glorifies terror.

In 2016, the Palestinian Authority spent more than $300 million — yes, members have heard correctly — on the salaries paid to terrorists and their families, on mass killers with innocent blood on their hands. The PA under Abbas dedicates approximately 7 per cent of its budget to funding terrorists and their families. How much of its budget does it spend on higher education? The answer is as low as 1 per cent. You do not need a university degree to determine where the Palestinian Authorities' priorities lie.

Mahmoud Abbas has made his position clear. He supports the policy of "pay to slay". Just recently, he said,

> "I will not compromise on the salary of a martyr or a prisoner."

This is the leader of the Palestinian Authority who pays terrorists to kill. The truth is plain and simple: Israel values every life, while the PA praises every death. Not only does Israel cherish life, but Israel believes firmly in building a better future for every person.

In Israel we value the freedom of expression, the freedom of ideas and the freedom of religion — for all religions. In Israel we empower women and minorities. We protect the rights of Muslims, Christians and Jews to pray at their holy sites. We commit to ensuring the safety of all worshippers and visitors and to taking the necessary measures to guarantee their complete security. In Israel we teach our children to invest in democratic values and a genuine, enduring peace. The Palestinians do not. They teach hate. They invest in terror. And they celebrate death.

In Palestinian classrooms fourth-graders solve word problems to calculate the number of terrorists killed in suicide attacks against Jews. If children are surrounded by the praise of terror in and out of school, they are destined to kill. Israel wants nothing more than to simply live in peace with its neighbours. We extend a hand in peace, but the Palestinians continue to say no. Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated time and again that we are ready and willing to negotiate — anytime and anywhere.

The United Nations is an Organization dedicated to peace, human rights and justice. One might think it would be quick to condemn the glorification of terror wherever it happens, but that is hardly the case, especially with regard to the Palestinians. The PA has mastered the art of deceit, and the international community has fallen for it. The Palestinians spin. They call those who send suicide bombers to Israeli restaurants, stab Israelis in the streets and seek Israel's ultimate destruction "political prisoners". Worst of all, the Palestinians fund their terror scheme through the generous donations of other countries. That is right: the international community has allowed approximately 30 per cent of foreign aid intended to support the Palestinian's well-being to fund blood money.

Israel will not tolerate the bankrolling of terror any longer. We will not accept the glorified killing of our citizens. I turn to the Palestinian representative and ask him to look at Oran and tell him and the Council that the Palestinian Authority will stop paying thousands of dollars every month to the terrorists and abusing international aid and foreign funds to promote terror. His silence speaks for itself

As Oran has taught us,

> "After what I have gone through, I know that even if they hurt you, they cannot defeat you. If we remain

united and continue to maintain our togetherness, no one can beat us".

Oran is a true hero, a true patriot and a true model for the appreciation of life. Like Oran and all the people of Israel, the Council must value life over death. The blind acceptance of murder cannot go on. The silence in the face of terror must end.

I turn now to the Security Council, a body founded to ensure "the maintenance of international peace and security" for all. The Council must not sacrifice the core values of justice, morality and truth for cheap political victories and empty promises. Let us pledge to work together to end this vulgar exploitation of international aid. Let us hold the Palestinians accountable and ensure that they teach their children to seek peace. Only then, will we see the possibility of real peace in our region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. The United States shares everyone's concern about the heightened tensions in Jerusalem. All parties should work to reduce these tensions, and we offer whatever assistance we can in helping to do that. At the holy sites, it is vital that both access and security be ensured. In keeping with Mr. Mladenov's recommendation, I am going to refrain from further comment on this sensitive issue in the hope that wisdom will prevail over emotions.

This is our monthly gathering to discuss the Middle East. The complicated and seemingly unending conflict there is frustrating to many Americans. It is frustrating to me. But truth be told, the Security Council often makes the Middle East more complicated than it actually is. It obsesses over Israel, and it refuses to acknowledge one of the chief sources of conflict and killing in the Middle East. That is Iran and its partner militia, the Lebanese Hizbullah. Hizbullah is a terrorist organization. In its own words, it is "dedicated to the destruction of Israel". It has the blood of hundreds of Americans and thousands of others on its hands. Together with its Iranian patron, Hizbullah seeks to cause destruction throughout the Middle East. Some regard Hizbullah as having two wings: a terrorist wing and a political and social wing. This is a convenient excuse for Hizbullah, but it is dangerous fiction. Just because a terrorist group also promotes political candidates for office does not make it any less a terrorist group.

For a glimpse of Hizbullah's true nature, we need look no further than its work on behalf of the Syrian dictator. From its base in Lebanon, Hizbullah sends its men into Syria. There, they have been responsible for some of the bloodiest campaigns of a very bloody war. They are returning to Lebanon battle-hardened and their presence in Syria keeps open their supply route of sophisticated weapons from Iran. Simply put, Hizbullah has grown stronger. It is preparing its men and its arsenal for a future war. None of this is secret. The leader of Hizbullah boasts about the destruction that his group of capable of. He talks openly about the support Iran provides. Hizbullah even takes journalists on tours of its military operations on the border that Lebanon shares with Israel — operations that are in defiance of the Council.

It is no secret where the United Nations stands either. It has adopted multiple resolutions calling on Hizbullah to disarm. It has called on the Lebanese State to exercise control over its territory. But neither of these things has happened. The trend is very much in the opposite direction. Hizbullah openly defies these resolutions and impedes the Lebanese Government's ability to exercise full control over its territory. For too long, the Security Council has chosen to pretend that the status quo is acceptable to the people of Lebanon. It is not. Hizbullah's illegal weapons build-up is putting the people of Lebanon in great danger. Remarkably, the Council has not even been able to bring itself to use the word "Hizbullah" in recent resolutions or statements on Lebanon. Many here are happy to name Israel time after time, but Hizbullah is somehow off limits. It is absurd; worse than that, it is dangerous.

The least the American people expect from the Council is to acknowledge the obvious threats that are right in front of us. How can I explain to them that there is a terrorist organization preparing its men and its arsenal for war, but that the United Nations refuses to even say its name. That must change. We must show Hizbullah that it cannot get away with its illegal weapons. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has an important role to play. The United States supports UNIFIL, but there is much more that UNIFIL should do to help prevent another conflict. It can begin by acknowledging what is happening right under its nose. There are reports of UNIFIL not fully investigating alleged violations. Sometimes it fails to report what its investigators have found. If UNIFIL cannot acknowledge illegal weapons that Hizbullah

parades in front of the media, one wonders what else it is missing. We will have more to say about UNIFIL when its mandate is up for renewal next month.

The American people sympathize with the challenges facing the Lebanese people. We will continue to support them as they combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and host over a million refugees. We understand that the issues in the Middle East are complex, but we also understand right and wrong, and we expect our leaders to know the difference as well. Hizbullah is a destructive terrorist force. It is a major obstacle to peace and the dangers it poses are getting larger, not smaller. Simply acknowledging this and saying it aloud would be a significant step forward, but we must do more than that. We must begin to get serious about enforcing our own resolutions that have been routinely violated by Iran and Hizbullah.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to Mr. Mukhtar Tileuberdi, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tileuberdi (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also express appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening today's open debate which highlights the crisis in the region and collectively seeks concerted action on several fronts in each of the critical countries.

The situation in the Middle East region is of great concern to Kazakhstan because the region is the epicentre of numerous armed conflicts of extreme complexity. These flash points and tensions have grave implications for international peace and security. Rivalry and the lack of trust, unity of purpose, justice, escalating stark economic and social inequalities and underdevelopment prevent the global community from achieving progress in the Middle East. As a result, today we are witnessing the rapid growth of terrorism and violent extremism, a grave humanitarian situation and violations of the most basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. We also see an unprecedented migration crisis and the suffering of millions of people. A most serious and dangerous problem is the fact that terrorism has spread all across the region. Syria, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon and Yemen are impacted and suffering from this scourge, and the international community needs to take a coordinated and united approach to combat this threat.

On the Palestinian question, we are concerned over the ongoing construction of settlements and the growing threat of violence, the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and economic backwardness, all of which are unacceptable. The escalated tensions in the holy city of Jerusalem — sparked by the killing of two Israeli policemen, the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the imposition of restrictions on worshippers — are further worsening the fragile security situation. As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we urge the Government of Israel to lift these restrictions, as such actions could escalate into a religious confrontation with dangerous repercussions. All acts of violence should end, and parties should refrain from conduct and actions that could lead to a further escalation of the already complicated situation on the ground.

The early resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, without any preconditions, is urgently needed. In this connection, we commend the efforts of the United States and Russia to facilitate the resumption of the peace dialogue within the framework of the Middle East Quartet. Kazakhstan supports a negotiated two-State solution, leading to the realization of the inalienable right of Palestinians to statehood and Israel's right to security. Both sides need to demonstrate the political will necessary to reach a historic and long-awaited peace agreement. One of the positive outcomes of the efforts undertaken thus far is the water-sharing agreement between Israel and Palestine, and we hope that it will create a positive atmosphere towards cooperation on other important issues on the bilateral agenda.

Kazakhstan welcomes the outcomes of the recent international high-level meetings within the framework of the Astana and Geneva processes and the recent agreements between the Russian Federation, the United States of America and Jordan regarding the de-escalation areas in south-western Syria. We call on all parties and countries involved to fully observe the ceasefire and continue to pursue every possible constructive interaction in order to restore peace and stability, for only then will we be able to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

We congratulate the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people on liberating Mosul from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This marks a significant turning point in the conflict and in countering international terrorism. The post-ISIL long-term recovery and reconstruction process will require unity,

inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation. We call upon the international community to support the Iraqi Government's new five-year national development plan, its 10-year reconstruction plan and its poverty reduction strategy.

Kazakhstan welcomes the consensus reached among the various political forces of Lebanon to adopt a new electoral law. The parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in May 2018 will positively promote the stabilization of the situation in the country and strengthen its State institutions. The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has exceeded 1 million. The international community must provide greater assistance to Lebanon for its generous gesture in hosting such an enormous number of refugees, in spite of its most limited resources.

The Yemeni crisis, which is a direct result of armed conflict, has no military solution but only a political one. My country is deeply concerned about the humanitarian and epidemiological situation in Yemen, where the cholera outbreak has further escalated an already acute humanitarian situation. We call upon all parties to the conflict to take decisive measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic by respecting international humanitarian law and to refrain from impeding humanitarian and medical access and supplies, which are obligations under international humanitarian law.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

Over the past two weeks, the Council has conducted two urgent series of consultations on the crises in Gaza and Jerusalem. The crises are localized, but they are not local. Each threatens to unleash a new escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine, as well as beyond the region. These acute crises only confirm the warning that many of us have regularly delivered to the Council. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not resolve itself. Let us be fully aware of the fact that the solution to the conflict does not lie in the principal actors acting on autopilot, on the basis of outdated software, nor on delusional shorcuts. There is no alternative to the difficult path to peace based on respect and negotiations.

Time does not make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict less dangerous. The rise in regional crises has neither normalized nor marginalized it. On the contrary, the lack of a solution to the conflict, which is particularly serious in and of itself, constitutes an ongoing threat to international security. Given its gravity, its symbolic dimension and its place in the collective imagination of the parties involved, the impact of this unresolved conflict has structural dimensions and goes beyond the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories. Any escalation in the conflict carries with it uncontrolled regional destabilization. For that reason, we cannot resign ourselves to a false status quo that conceals a daily regression, both on the ground and in peoples' minds. The end of the current path is clear. The idea of a two-State solution will disappear like a mirage in the desert. That would represent a leap into the unknown and the risk of a worst-case scenario.

The crisis in Jerusalem shows that a surge in violence can occur at any time in the region and beyond, given the spiritual, religious and symbolic weight of the Temple Mount. In the light of the alarming rise in tensions and violence in recent days, France has expressed its extreme concern and stressed the imperative for a return to calm. In that regard, we have taken note of the removal of the metal detectors, which is an encouraging signal. We hope that it will open the way to a lasting settlement of the situation. France also recalls that such appeasement requires respect for the historical status quo of 1967 and cooperation among the Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian parties. We continue to monitor the situation with the utmost attention and reiterate our call for the utmost restraint. As Mr. Mladenov rightly stressed, there is a need to avoid transforming the political conflict, which can and must be subject to agreement and compromise, into a religious conflict that would make any compromise impossible.

In Gaza, the continuing humanitarian crisis for 2 million Palestinians has suddenly deteriorated due to cuts to the electricity supply, that have lasted more than three months. The inhabitants of Gaza live today with two to three hours of electricity per day on average. The energy crisis is paralysing medical, sanitary and water treatment infrastructure. It strikes the weakest in Gaza, not the leaders of Hamas. If nothing is done, the ongoing tensions could lead to a new deadly conflict of the sort seen three times in the Gaza Strip in less than a decade. That would be unacceptable. Israel must fully assume its responsibilities as the occupying Power by, inter alia, alleviating restrictions on the movement of goods and persons to and from Gaza. It is also critical that the Palestinians reach a reconciliation agreement. We know that there can be no viable Palestinian State

without Palestinian unity, based on the principle of the two-State solution. More critically, a lasting political solution must be found for Gaza, predicated on the lifting of the blockade and robust security guarantees for Israel.

The crisis calls for an urgent response, both from the parties involved and from the international community. But beyond that immediate demand, we must restore the prospects for a just peace, in which Palestinians and Israelis are ever less inclined to believe. Violence is proliferating in the current political vacuum, and that violence is unacceptable. The recent deaths of 10 people in attacks and clashes in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories serve as a new tragic illustration of that. We condemn all violence, and the well-known, horrendous murders of three members of an Israeli family in a settlement in the West Bank, must be firmly repudiated.

In that context, it is essential to return to the negotiating table. Such negotiations are of course incumbent on the parties, but their outcome must not be pre-empted by faits accomplis. Settlement-building, which is illegal under international law, directly threatens the preservation of the two-State solution on the ground and the prospect for a fair and lasting peace for both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The announcement at the beginning of the month of the construction of 1,500 new housing units in East Jerusalem is unprecedented. It is a very bad sign and will only fuel tensions on the ground.

It is therefore necessary to provide a genuine political horizon to both Israelis and Palestinians. France welcomes and encourages all initiatives undertaken to that end, in particular by the United States. It also recalls the fact that all attempts to partially address the conflict have failed. Economic development and security arrangements can make sense only in the context of a comprehensive agreement. The path to achieve that is not easy; sacrifices will be required on both sides. However, there is no alternative to internationally agreed parameters: two States living in peace and security along secure and recognized borders, based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed-upon territorial exchanges, with Jerusalem as the capital of the two States.

France is a friend of both Palestinians and Israelis. That is why we will speak truth and steadfastly call for a return to the negotiation table. We will never throw in the towel. Faced with the temptation to put off addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or to lose sight of the need for a final status agreement, it is essential to reaffirm the two-State framework. As President of the Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, said to the Palestinian President and to the Israeli Prime Minister, whom he hosted in Paris in recent weeks, France will remain firmly committed to this issue and will fully contribute to the efforts, which are more necessary than ever, to restore a credible and dynamic policy.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Bolivia expresses its strong support for sincere, cross-cutting and transparent dialogue to achieve the two-State solution. We are convinced, like all other States Members of the United Nations, that both Israel and Palestine have the right to live in security as free and independent States.

As on other occasions, we endorse the initiatives that lead to a peaceful settlement to the conflict between Palestine and Israel, such as the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and others that seek to ensure a just and lasting peace for both peoples. In that regard, we reaffirm our full commitment to multilateralism and to debate framed by respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the States.

On this occasion, I would like to express our deepest condolences to the families of the Palestinian and Israeli citizens who died over the past few days in violent clashes in the territories of Jerusalem and the West Bank. As a pacifist State, we categorically reject all kinds of acts of force that result in the loss of human life, regardless of who commits them or the circumstances in which they occur. Our commitment to the sanctity of life prevails over all ideological speech or action that embraces violence as a valid means to achieve an end, regardless of how fair that end may appear.

Unfortunately, again and as on other occasions, we are participating in this open debate in a context that does little to inspire optimism for the long-desired

peace in the Middle East. The Israeli Government recently sought to justify a number of violations of international law, including practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967.

Between 16 July and today, at least eight deaths have occurred in clashes that took place in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. As members of the Security Council, we cannot allow an escalation in the violence that adds to the deaths, be they Israeli or Palestinian.

On 21 July, last Friday, the Israeli police issued a communiqué announcing the implementation of a series of measures restricting the access of men under the age of 50 and Palestinian women in general to the Holy Esplanade. In imposing those new restrictions, which include metal detectors and metal barriers at the holy sites that surround the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel is violating the historic status quo. We must recall the historic General Assembly resolution 181 (II), of 1947, which refers to the fact that the liberty of access to holy sites and sanctuaries and religious buildings, as well as freedom of worship, shall be guaranteed, in conformity with existing rights and subject to requirements of public order and decorum.

We join the nations that today are calling on the parties to heed the call of history and to sit down together to begin a frank and sincere dialogue, while refraining from any attitude whose outcome is to increase the violence in a land already steeped in volatility, a land in which various faiths and cultures should coexist and recognize their shared humanity.

We also call upon all parties to refrain from resorting to the use of aggressive rhetoric, which fans the flames of hostility between both peoples. It is crucial that every possible effort be made to avoid any escalation of violence, which ultimately affects innocent men, women, children and the elderly.

We express once again our commitment to the immediate implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and we encourage all members of the Security Council to join forces for its implementation without further delay. We believe that all the resolutions adopted by the Council should be implemented with the same rigor and commitment that they demand, with the sole purpose of guaranteeing international peace and security.

In conclusion, we emphatically reaffirm that the only long-term solution to the conflict is the two-State solution, with an Israeli State and a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, within the pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation, through me, would like to welcome the convening of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for the clarity of his briefing. The information he shared with us once again confronts us with the extreme volatility of the situation on the ground and in the peace process, which has clearly been struggling since 2014.

Against the backdrop of the particularly tense situation in Jerusalem, a city that is a symbol of three monotheistic religions, my delegation calls upon the parties to work to reduce tensions, as Mr. Mladenov urged. We reiterate our call for respect for the status quo of the Muslim and Christian holy sites, including the Holy Esplanade, and welcome the important role Jordan continues to play in that regard.

The fourth International Conference on Jerusalem — which just took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 20 and 21 July, at the initiative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation — rightly drew attention to the centrality of the issue of that city in the search for negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict. While expressing our condolences to the relatives of the victims of the recent violence, we reiterate our disapproval and condemnation of all forms and manifestations of violence and terrorism, regardless of the perpetrators or motives.

On 19 and 20 June, here at Organization Headquarters in New York, that Committee, in accordance with its mandate from the General Assembly, organized a forum to mark 50 years since the Arab-Israeli war. On that occasion, Israeli and Palestinian participants, as well as experts and members of civil society from various backgrounds, with innovative ideas, urged the

international community — in particular the Security Council, in view of its international obligations — to work tirelessly in support of the two-State solution, which is the only viable solution, as it would guarantee peace and security to both Israelis and the Palestinians, who are condemned by geography to live together.

At a time when we agree on the need to give priority to conflict prevention, the disastrous humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Gaza, which appears to be a time bomb, should receive our full attention. The Special Coordinator recently alerted us to the scale of the crisis, at the same time launching a call for $35 million in funding to cover emergency needs.

In its report entitled *Gaza Ten Years Later*, the United Nations country team — which in 2012 had already pointed out that Gaza would become unliveable by 2020 should the trend continue — describes once again a most bleak humanitarian situation. In addition, there are structural problems linked to the supply of water and electricity, and to sanitation, not to mention the rebuilding of infrastructure. My delegation therefore urges Palestinian political actors to set aside their divisions in order to tackle humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges, in particular the electricity supply gap, which affects about 2 million people, half of whom are children. Against that backdrop, we reiterate our support for ongoing efforts to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has predictable, adequate and sustained resources, with a view to enabling it to continue its vital work for the benefit of millions of Palestinian refugees.

Beyond the humanitarian aspect, however, with the support of the international community, the parties should work towards the recovery of the Palestinian economy, particularly in Gaza, which suffers from the decline in assistance from external partners. In these difficult circumstances, we renew our appeal to the parties, in accordance with their repeated commitments to the two-State solution, to open negotiations that would lead to a definitiveg peace that responds to the security needs of Israel and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for a sovereign State.

While renewing its support for the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by several countries — including Egypt, France, Jordan and the Russian Federation — my delegation also calls for the culmination of the ongoing efforts of the United States with a view to relaunching the peace process, on the basis of existing platforms such as the Arab Peace Initiative, which was reaffirmed at the latest Summit of the League of Arab States.

Seventy years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the international community, in particular the Security Council, has no choice but to redouble its efforts to fully implement these texts, so that, like the Israeli people, who enjoy a prosperous State, the Palestinian people can see their legitimate aspirations for a sovereign and viable State fulfilled.

Senegal will continue to support any initiative to achieve the two-State solution.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to extend our gratitude to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladnenov, for the thorough briefing and for the efforts that he has undertaken.

We are deeply troubled by the escalation of tension in Palestinian-Israeli relations. We firmly and categorically condemn any manifestation of terrorism, which worsens the already difficult relationship between the parties and erodes the situation in the region as a whole.

We believe that a solution to the issue of Jerusalem, a sacred city for the three monotheistic religions, must hinge on General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The specific parameters of an agreement on the city must be arrived at through direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Prior to reaching such an agreement, the parties must refrain from any action that predetermines the final status of Jerusalem. In that regard, the aim of close coordination between Israel and Jordan is to help calm the situation at the holy sites in East Jerusalem and to maintain the status quo around them. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan plays a specific and important role in the management of Muslim holy sites.

The protracted pause in the peace process carries with it a high risk of further escalating the situation. The destabilizing factors have not been addressed; rather, they have worsened. Settlement activity is ongoing and, in recent days, in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, provocative rhetoric on both sides has been heightened.

The situation in the Gaza Strip requires specific attention. The humanitarian situation there remains dire. There are major disruptions in the provision of electricity. The unemployment level is among the highest in the world. What remains on the agenda is the need to provide for intra-Palestinian unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and under the auspices of a legitimate Palestinian leadership. We support the mediation efforts of the parties, including those undertaken by the Arab Republic of Egypt. The solution lies not only in stabilizing the current situation, but — and this is important — in paving the way for a genuine political horizon for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement through direct talks between the parties on the universally recognized international legal basis.

Russia helps to facilitate progress in the political process, acting both bilaterally and through the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which we view as a critical mechanism and which has been endorsed by Security Council resolutions. We are keen to further contribute to upholding unity within Palestinian ranks. We reaffirm our initiative on conducting a meeting in Moscow between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Our position was and remains steadfast: a comprehensive, fair and lasting peace can be achieved exclusively through the relevant international legal instruments, including Security Council resolutions as well as the Arab Peace Initiative, and through direct talks between the parties, without preconditions. Such negotiations must lead to a cessation of what began in 1967, namely, Israel's occupation of Arab lands, and to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting side by side in peace with Israel and within secure and recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and with West Jerusalem becoming the capital of the State of Israel. We see no alternative to the two-State solution. That is the sole realistic means to put an end to the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and to mutual recriminations.

The Middle East and North Africa region remains in crisis — old crises and new crises. The most recent wave of instability in the occupied Palestinian territories only confirms this lamentable reality. There are still terrorists in many parts of the region and beyond, despite the gains in combatting terrorism, who seek to gain possession of chemical weapons. Once again, last night the Russian Embassy in Damascus was shelled twice. We call upon our partners to condemn such attacks.

We once again call attention to the fact that the destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa has significantly disrupted the fragile ethno-religious balance that has historically prevailed in the region. Extremists have exploited this religious factor, thereby unleashing a veritable genocide against Christians and other minorities with one end in mind: to stoke hatred and to swell their own ranks.

All of that serves to bolter our position in favour of concerted efforts on the part of the international community to forge genuine cooperation and build a wide-ranging counter-terrorism front to effectively repel the global terrorism threat, including depriving terrorists of access to chemical weapons and other types of weapons.

It is axiomatic that, in parallel with counter-terrorism measures, we must takes steps for a political settlement to the myriad conflicts and to restore peace and stability in the Middle East and the North Africa region. With respect to resolving the crises in the Middle East, Russia has steadfastly called for a political and diplomatic process, for which there is no alternative, one that hinges on inclusive national dialogue. We continue to focus efforts on achieving effective and enduring results and will continue urging the belligerents to overcome the mistrust, without imposing any external solutions, in order to seek a political settlement. It is our hope that our partners share that approach.

We reaffirm our position in favour of respect and upholding the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States. Efforts to settle regional crises must be premised on diplomacy, dialogue and engagement. History attests to the fact that with goodwill even the most intractable crises can be settled.

We call upon all international and regional players to overcome their differences and disagreements on an equal footing, without counter-productive rhetoric or mutual recrimination, in order to demonstrate a constructive position and self-restraint and seek mutually acceptable solutions. On that basis, we stand ready to work collectively.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I would like to align myself with the statement to be made later today on behalf of the European Union.

I would also like to thank Special Envoy Mladenov for his timely briefing to the Security Council this morning.

Together with Egypt and France, Sweden called for yesterday's discussion in the Council because we were deeply concerned by the heightened tensions and violent clashes, including loss of life in and around occupied East Jerusalem, particularly at Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. It is critical to avoid any further escalation of the situation, which, as highlighted by Mr. Mladenov, could have consequences far beyond the walls of the Old City.

Since the Council met yesterday, we have learned that Israel has decided to remove the metal detectors at the entrances of the Holy Esplanade — a key demand from the Palestinian side, as well as Jordan and many other Arab countries. That is a step that we hope can pave the way for de-escalation. It remains of great importance to uphold the historic status quo at the holy sites.

Jerusalem is home to three religions, and it has a special status granted by the United Nations in 1947. The special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and of His Majesty King Abdullah II, as recognized in the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, is key, and we appreciate the efforts that Jordan, as well as many others, are making to find a solution to the crisis.

While we are hopefully close to a solution to the immediate crisis, we must not lose sight of the urgent need to find a just, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Developments on the ground, unfortunately, continue to take us further away from the two-State solution.

We are deeply concerned about the recent Israeli announcement of the issuance of building permits for 1,500 new settlement units in East Jerusalem. As reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), the establishment of settlements by Israel in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. Settlements further constitute a major obstacle to peace and, if not reversed, will render the two-State solution impossible. We call on the Israeli authorities to immediately reverse that decision.

We unequivocally condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism. We condemned the attack on 14 July in the Old City of Jerusalem and we welcome the swift and firm condemnation by President Abbas in that regard. In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we reiterate the call for immediate steps to prevent such violence, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction, and for accountability in that regard.

We are extremely worried about the situation in Gaza, particularly the humanitarian consequences of the energy crisis and Israel's policy of closure. Civilians, including women and children, should not pay the price for this long-lasting crisis. However, they continue to do so on a daily basis. The energy crisis, which has resulted in lack of access to basic essential services, including water and sanitation, is an assault on their human dignity. Sweden is one of the major donors to Gaza and recently made additional funding available, given the gravity of the situation.

While humanitarian assistance is needed to mitigate the effects on the people of Gaza, it alone will never resolve the problem. All Palestinian factions must commit to finding a solution to the energy crisis. Furthermore, while fully understanding the legitimate security concerns of Israel and Palestine, full and sustained access for humanitarian actors and all donors is crucial. An immediate end to the Israeli closure policy is therefore necessary.

The question of Gaza should not be separated from the peace process. All Palestinian factions need to engage in good faith in a reconciliation process that leads to a unified Palestinian leadership and the reunification of Gaza with the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Fifty years ago, the Council affirmed that the fulfilment of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations required the establishment of just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries, free from threats and acts of force. Today, 50 years later, we have yet to realize that just and lasting peace.

Ending the occupation and achieving a two-State solution is the only way forward. The two-State solution reflects the consensus of the international community and must not be called into question. However, it is becoming more distant by the day. Unless we act, we are moving rapidly towards not only perpetual occupation, but a one-State reality, which would not be in the interests of the State of Israel.

The United States has always played a leading role in efforts to advance peace in the Middle East. We are encouraged by continued efforts by the United States Administration, and we welcome the holding of the Quartet meeting of 13 July. We hope that it will constitute the first step towards relaunching a meaningful peace process, leading to the achievement of the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing on the latest situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank him as well for always being as objective as possible. We understand how difficult the job is. I believe this must be said, although it might sound trite.

Let me start by expressing our deepest sorrow and sympathy in connection with the loss of lives in the recent outbreak of violence. We recall with appreciation the statement issued by the Secretary-General, who called on both sides to refrain from taking any action that would further escalate the situation. Violence must be condemned and also, as the Secretary-General said:

> "The sanctity of religious sites should be respected as places for reflection, not violence".

This sentiment was also echoed by the Quartet, which, in its statement of 22 July, noted the particular sensitivities surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and the need to ensure security, thus encouraging Israel and Jordan to work together to uphold the status quo. We are pleased that all concerned seem to have played their role in reducing the prevailing tension, and one hopes the situation will continue to be controlled. However, the danger should not be understated.

All this makes it self-evident that unless the underlying problems are solved peacefully, the kinds of reactions that took place over the past week are likely to happen again and again, eventually getting to a point of no return. That is why preserving the possibility of finding a solution through the two-State formula is absolutely critical. There is no other viable option. All arguments to the contrary are unrealistic and inconsistent with a firm commitment to seek a just and democratic solution to the problem.

It is indeed unfortunate that the outbreak of violence in Jerusalem overshadowed some of the modest but positive steps taken recently, which have the potential to de-escalate tensions and contribute to advancing understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. Here I am referring to the agreement recently signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which the Special Coordinator mentioned earlier, to increase the electricity supply to Jenin. This is in addition to another agreement signed between the two sides that deals with addressing the issue of the water supply. It is positive developments such as this that demonstrate that the two sides can indeed cooperate, giving us reason not to lose hope in the quest for a lasting solution to the long-standing dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. These two very hard-working and intelligent peoples, who have, as the Special Coordinator said, an inextricably linked history cannot allow peace and the possibility of living side by side as equals to elude them. This is our hope.

We welcome the meeting of the Middle East Quartet that took place on 13 January aimed at discussing current efforts to advance Middle East peace as well as the deteriorating situation in Gaza. We believe that the continuous engagement of the Quartet with Israelis and Palestinians as well as other key regional stakeholders is absolutely essential to efforts to resolve the crisis. As far as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is concerned, Ethiopia's position has always been very clear. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State.

Let me reiterate that we think that the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security is the only viable option to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Any obstacle to this goal should be addressed so as to pave the way for progress in the peace talks. While it is the parties that should show the flexibility to engage in direct and meaningful negotiations so as to reach a final settlement on all issues, we believe that the international community, and particularly the Council, should help and encourage the two sides to do so. It is in this context that we support the initiatives that have been under way to facilitate negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. The efforts of the Middle East Quartet and its road map, the Arab Peace Initiative as well as the efforts of countries within and outside the Council are very much appreciated and should be encouraged to continue.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): The situation in the Middle East remains volatile and complex. Many issues affect

one another, further deepening their complexity. The Palestinian issue is one of the most complex.

Japan continues to support a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, which will achieve peaceful coexistence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel within secure and recognized borders. The final status of Jerusalem should be resolved through negotiations based on the assumption that it will be the future capital of both sides. We must continue to work together to achieve a solution that is just and sustainable.

Since the previous open debate on this issue (see S/PV.7929), we have not seen any breakthroughs. The familiar obstacles to peace that we have seen for years persist. Japan is seriously concerned about the escalating tension in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The attack that occurred in the Old City of Jerusalem cannot be justified for any reason, and Japan condemns it. Japan stresses the importance of respecting the peace of the holy sites.

The cycle of violence that followed shows how violent incidents can snowball into a highly volatile and dangerous situations. Violence is incompatible with the peaceful resolution of conflict, and the relevant parties must continue to work together to de-escalate the situation.

Settlement activities continue in both the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The physical expansion of settlements erodes the viability of a two-State solution. Japan has issued a series of statements deeply deploring such activities. Settlement activities are in violation of international law, and we have called upon Israel to freeze such activities. Japan does not recognize any unilateral change by either party that may prejudge the final resolution.

Resolution of the conflict through dialogue and agreement is also the spirit of resolution 2334 (2016). Reconciliation among Palestinians is another important element in promoting peace. The deepening divide between the West Bank and Gaza is concerning, and it is the people of Gaza who bear the burden of that divide. Japan believes that the re-establishment of effective governance by the Palestinian Authority over Gaza will contribute to the overall peace process.

The current plight of the people of Gaza is serious. Fatah and Hamas must find a way to alleviate this suffering. We should also recall that the blockade of the Gaza Strip directly affects livelihoods in Gaza. Japan stresses the importance of improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip by further easing the blockade while securing the prevention of the inflow of arms.

International efforts to relaunch the dialogue continue against the backdrop of these persistent obstacles. We are encouraged by the Quartet's more visible engagement. Japan also appreciates the continued engagement by the United States, which is particularly crucial.

The agreement on the allocation of water through the Red Sea-Dead Sea project to Palestinians shows what dialogue can achieve. Confidence-building, though concrete cases of cooperation, is in line with Japan's efforts over the years. Japan believes that such confidence-building efforts constitute part of the endeavour to promote the overall peace process through negotiations. These include the Jericho Agro Industrial Park, which hosts six Palestinian firms, with some of their products being exported to Jordan. We encourage interested parties to come and see what cooperation between Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Japan can achieve.

The international community is playing an important role by encouraging dialogue and mutual trust. However, the political will of the parties is required first and foremost to relaunch negotiations and to rein in obstacles to peace. We must continue to encourage the parties to make difficult decisions. Japan will continue its engagement through the three pillars of political dialogue, confidence-building and economic cooperation.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his precise and clear analysis and briefing.

I would like to begin my statement by reaffirming our extreme concern to the Council about the spiral of tension and violence in Jerusalem and in all of the West Bank. We mourn the tragic loss of life. On 14 July, Italy condemned the terrorist attack that took place on the same day in the holy city of Jerusalem against the Salomon family. There is no justification for murders or for the glorification of violence, and we welcome President Abbas' condemnation of that attack. The deaths of two policemen in the holy city of Jerusalem and

those of the three Israelis in the Halamish settlement, in the West Bank, are also tragic.

We mourn the loss of life among Palestinians, with several young people killed during the recent clashes, and we reaffirm the right of peaceful demonstration. We take note of Prime Minister Netanyahu's assurance that no change to the status quo of the holy sites will be introduced. We stress the special role of the Kingdom of Jordan and His Majesty King Abdullah II, with regard to the sites. We call on all parties to do their utmost to diffuse the escalating violence, restore calm and uphold the status quo in the holy places in Jerusalem, in word and in practice. The decision of the Israeli Government to remove metal detectors is a step in the right direction. We call on Israel to further coordinate with Jordan on all measures concerning the holy places, including with regard to enhancing security. We also stress the importance of maintaining security cooperation between Israel and Palestine.

Let me now reiterate our full adherence to Italy's long-established position on the Middle East peace process, including with regard to the 1967 lines and to East Jerusalem, as set out in the relevant conclusion of the Council of the European Union, and our unwavering support for all efforts to resume peace talks between Israel and Palestine. We believe that just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine needs to be based on a two-State solution, as the only achievable objective of direct negotiations between the two parties.

Many obstacles need to be overcome on the road to peace, among them violence, as sadly confirmed by the most recent events I alluded to earlier in my statement, and settlements, which deserve special consideration. Italy condemns the intensified expansion of Israel's settlements following the recent approval by Israeli authorities of a plan to build almost 1,000 housing units in a settlement in East Jerusalem. We believe that that decision runs counter to the prospect for a two-State solution and undermines the chance of ensuring a future of peace and security for the parties.

The dire situation in Gaza deserves our utmost attention. The most recent report by the United Nations country team provides an alarming description of the de-development of the Gaza strip in the past decade. Italy supports President Abbas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian leadership and it upholds the goal of increasing pressure by the Palestinian authorities on Hamas in order to retake control of the Gaza Strip and to restore the whole of Palestine under a single democratic and legitimate authority. While doing so, the humanitarian consequences on the people living in Gaza must be taken into account as a priority, particularly in the health sector.

Against that demanding background, I find it appropriate to acknowledge some positive, though limited progress. First of all, we always believe that technical collaboration between the parties in the delivery of basic services is critical, not as a substitute for peace but to crucially improve the living conditions of all Palestinians. Therefore, it is significant that two agreements on electricity and water have been signed in recent days. We encourage the parties to keep working on cooperation at the ground level and to devise new joint initiatives. Secondly, we welcome the recent meeting of the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet and wish to reaffirm the role that the Quartet can play in order to create an environment that is conducive to the resumption of peace talks.

Turning to Lebanon, Italy commends all Lebanese parties on reaching a historic agreement on the new electoral law. We are convinced that the renewal of the Parliament next year will be a milestone in terms of strengthening Lebanon's institutions. It is hoped that that will create better conditions for increasing the State's presence and authority across the country, as requested by relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, I would like to stress the essential work carried out by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of Lebanon, faithful to its mandate as a crucial player for the stability of the country and the geographical area plagued by conflict. Finally, while reiterating Italy's firm support to the Lebanese authorities, I would like to acknowledge the unwavering commitment of Prime Minister Hariri and his Government to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), through its cooperation with the Special Coordinator and UNIFIL.

I would like to conclude by mentioning the liberation of Mosul from Da'esh, undertaken by Iraqi Government security forces, with the support of a global coalition, as a sign of hope in a geographic area marked by multiple crises. That result is a landmark in the joint fight against terrorism in the Middle East and points to future achievement in the region. While the military fight against Da'esh is not over and the need to ensure the protection of human rights must still be upheld, our attention should now also turn

to stabilizing the territory once under the control of Da'esh. Humanitarian assistance and the restoration of essential services are crucial in order to underpin the military victory and allow the return of internally displaced people.

Reconciliation in Iraq and a political transition in Syria remain the keys to preventing any resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. In that regard, I would like to emphasize the need to uphold and protect the right and freedom of all ethnic and religious communities in the region, including the Christian communities.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I join with others in commending you, Sir, on convening today's open debate.

I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his detailed briefing and, as we do every month, we reiterate Uruguay's full support for his efforts.

As the days go by, with a few exceptions, regrettably, the situation in the Middle East either remains the same or worsens. It is clear that, above and beyond its good intentions, the Council has not been able to honour its commitment to restoring peace and stability to the conflict-stricken region. Like most of us, the people of that region of the world want only to live in peace, far removed from the horrors of war, violence, terrorism and human rights violations. We recall the millions of faceless victims who have endured wars and invasions — some of them conceived from afar — the pillaging of their resources and wealth, constant changes to their land based on foreign interests, the actions of terrorist groups who insult the very religion with which they claim to be affiliated, and a slew of Governments and authoritarian regimes that are clearly out of touch with the desires of their peoples. All of this has created fertile ground for the fomenting of extremism and radicalism, which themselves have become both the result and the cause of new conflicts. Despite all of this, we continue to be optimistic and to hope that the peoples of the Middle East will soon be on the road to progress and cooperation in a peaceful environment. To achieve that, the continued support of the Council and the entire international community is essential.

With regard to the recently escalating situation in Jerusalem, which has spread rapidly to other areas and threatens to become a major new crisis, Uruguay reiterates its firm condemnation of all the violent incidents, which have left more than 10 victims. This worrying situation creates distrust between the parties concerned and affects all the efforts designed to enable a resumption of bilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations aimed at reaching a two-State solution. The sacred sites of the city of Jerusalem, where three of the world's major religions converge, should be places of reflection and peace, not violence and terror. It is therefore crucial to maintain unrestricted access for the faithful to their temples and ensure that this is reflected in concrete action. In that regard, we were pleased by the Government of Israel's decision to act by removing the metal detectors installed last week. However, the critical situation in Gaza, to which the Council has not given enough attention, is threatening to result in a new humanitarian disaster very quickly. We should make every effort to prevent this scenario from leading to another war.

As it has done since 1947, Uruguay once again reaffirms its unfailing support to the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders in an atmosphere of renewed cooperation, free from any threats to peace or acts that violate it. We also reiterate our support to a solution based on two independent States in the belief that it is the only option that will enable Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace, and in that regard we once again urge for the resumption of direct negotiations between the two as a crucial path to that end. We welcome all international initiatives aimed at advancing the peace process in order to achieve a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting settlement that accords with international law in taking into consideration the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians.

However, in order to achieve that goal, it is essential to reverse the current trends on the ground, since Palestine will otherwise find it extremely difficult to consolidate its State. It is regrettable that, seven months after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), little progress has been made in its implementation, while Israel's announcements of its expansion of settlements in the occupied territories are increasing. Similarly, the announcements of demolitions and the forced transfer of vulnerable communities such as Dakika, Khan Al-Ahmar and Susya only provoke uncontrolled reactions.

The recent violent incidents and terrorist attacks, and their encouragement and glorification through subsidy payments to the families of those who commit them or by naming schools, buildings and squares after them, do nothing to advance the cause of peace and put the possibility of reaching a two-State solution in jeopardy. However, just as in the past we have repeatedly emphasized that we cannot be silently complicit in the face of terrorist attacks, we would like to take this opportunity to appreciate the fact that President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority has condemned the 14 July shooting on the Mosque esplanade. On a somewhat more personal and timely note, I hope that we in the Council will soon see the day when our colleagues Mr. Riyad Mansour and Mr. Danny Danon can stop trading mutual accusations and blaming each other and instead inform us of developments in direct negotiations aimed at putting an end to this dreadful conflict once and for all. Our Colombian brothers have shown us that it is possible to leave behind the pain of 50 years of war and to embrace the commitment and risks of a peace agreement.

Uruguay is shocked by the serious plight of civilians in Yemen, where according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the humanitarian crisis is even more serious than in Syria. It is regrettable that the situation there is still not receiving the same degree of attention from the Council as other regional crises are. Yemen is on the verge of famine. It is suffering from a rapidly spreading cholera epidemic and its hospitals, schools and markets continue to be the target of indiscriminate attacks. The prolonged stagnation of the peace process and the widespread violations of international humanitarian law and human rights committed by all the warring parties have left millions of civilians drowning in chaos and terrible suffering. Anyone perpetrating attacks or providing logistical support and weapons in Yemen, should cease hostilities immediately. Those responsible for the revolting atrocities that have already been committed should be brought to justice.

I would like to comment very briefly on the conflict in Syria. Despite the fact that the Astana ceasefire process has resulted in a considerable drop in violence in some parts of the country, we are still seeing sieges and famines, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the use of chemical weapons, terrorist attacks and extremely serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, all while the Council's frustrating inaction continues. We are concerned about the fact that although the political process in Geneva has made some progress, albeit modest, that has not resulted in any improvements in humanitarian access to the millions who are subsisting with no help at all in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We reiterate that this horrific war can be ended only through a process of political transition, led by Syrians and mediated by the United Nations in accordance with the road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

In conclusion, where the recent situation that has arisen among some of the States of the Arab peninsula is concerned, we hope that the tensions can be overcome through dialogue and negotiations.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on some of the most burning issues in the Middle East and to express our appreciation to Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

The Middle East peace process remains at the core of all efforts aimed at restoring stability in the region. Ukraine has consistently supported that crucial process and the principle of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. We share the concerns of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator about the escalation of tensions and violence in Jerusalem, which reflects the gravity of the situation in and around the Old City as well as in the wider context of the peace process.

The recent deadly terror attacks in the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif and in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank say a great deal about how far this pattern of escalation has gone. Unless both sides take swift and effective measures, these incidents could ignite further violence. We have stressed time and again that there can be no justification for any terrorist acts and have firmly condemned any attempts to glorify them. We are increasingly concerned about the violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem and the West Bank in which at least three people have died. The decision of the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to freeze contacts with Israel is a worrying sign that the situation could get out of hand very quickly.

We note the statement of Secretary General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit of the League of Arab States about the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif. At the same time, we would like to take this opportunity to urge both

Jordan, as Custodian of the holy site, and Israel to find a reasonable compromise between public safety and freedom to worship. We also urge everyone to act responsibly so as to avoid escalation and calm the situation and prevent it from spiralling out of control. Ukraine reiterates its position that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is to be found in the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to Syria, let me stress our dissatisfaction with the slow progress on the political track. Based on the latest rounds of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, I see only one party willing to work constructively on the agreed agenda. The Syrian regime's delegation, on the contrary, has so far demonstrated interest in discussing only one basket, which is counter-terrorism. I believe that the Security Council has made it clear on a number of occasions that one basket cannot be promoted at the expense of the other three. That is why we underscore once again that the Geneva discussion needs to be firmly entrenched in resolution 2254 (2015) and steered towards the previously agreed common agenda points covering the issues of governance, the Constitution, elections and counter-terrorism.

On the whole, the international community should avoid at all costs falling into the trap of short-term solutions with regard to the Syrian conflict. Such short-term fixes seem to provide temporary relief, only to set the stage for a deeper crisis in the long term. The fact that none of the root causes of the conflict has been addressed essentially means more opportunities for Da'esh and Al-Qaida to capitalize on the grievances of the disaffected population.

Ukraine is deeply concerned about the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen: it is going from bad to worse. The cholera epidemic, which is quickly spreading in every major Yemeni province, has pushed the country's population to the brink of survival. We praise the efforts of the United Nations and all other humanitarian actors that are delivering lifesaving assistance to the Yemeni people. We urge the parties to ensure the sustainable delivery of commercial and humanitarian supplies; without them, millions of Yemenis are at risk of famine and death. In the political sphere, we are worried by the latest trends of an increasing polarization of key stakeholders in Yemen and the further fragmentation of the Yemeni political landscape. We call on all parties to resume direct talks without preconditions, and to conduct them in the most flexible and constructive manner possible.

The situation in the Middle East is very worrying and full of challenges. We call on the Council to remain united in addressing them.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting today to consider the Palestinian question while the occupied Palestinian territories are experiencing serious and dangerous events, especially with regard to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which have led to a deterioration of the situation not only in Al-Quds but throughout the occupied Palestinian territories — and perhaps even beyond the region, given the unique meaning that Al-Quds Al-Sharif has not only for Palestinians and Arabs but also for the entire Muslim world.

We have already warned of the grave repercussions of the recent events. We reiterate our call upon Israel to end the violence and the security escalations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the grave toll in terms of dead and wounded among Palestinians. We also call upon Israel to respect freedom of worship and religion, as well as the right of the Palestinian people to practice their faith in freedom and security. We call upon Israel to refrain from taking additional measures that are liable to further fan the flames of the conflict, incite religious passions and worsen the suffering endured by the Palestine people, thereby undermining prospects for achieving a fair, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution.

To us it is important to reiterate once again the Council's own pronouncements concerning the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In that connection, I refer to the Council's press statement of 17 September 2015 (SC/12052), which calls for upholding the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in word and in practice, including by safeguarding the right and freedom of Muslim worshippers to practice their faith. It is also important to refer to well-known measures adopted by the Council, including resolution 478 (1980), which reaffirms that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that threaten to change the situation with respect to the holy city of Jerusalem are null and void and must be rescinded. Moreover, resolution 2334 (2016) does not acknowledge any change to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard

to Al-Quds, except with the consent of the parties through negotiations.

In that regard, I would like to reaffirm that Egypt welcomes the efforts aimed at de-escalating the current crisis, including those undertaken by Jordan in the light of the historic role of the brotherly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in connection with its custodianship of the sacred sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. We have taken note of the Israeli decision to remove the metal detectors. We hope that the situation will return to normal, including with regard to Jordan.

If the current crisis were to continue, its consequences would not be limited to Palestine and Israel. It is necessary for us all and for the Council to be aware of that. For it incumbent upon the Council to maintain international peace and security, as well as shoulder the responsibility to monitor the crisis so that the situation does not spiral out of control, and maintain prospects for direct negotiations, including final status issues encompassing Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The occupation of Palestinian territories continues without any glimmer of hope of ending that tragic situation. Measures taken against the Palestinian people are increasing at an accelerated rate. Settlement expansion is also continuing. United Nations and Security Council resolutions that call for upholding the principles of the Charter of the United Nations are not being implemented. I am speaking principally of the right to self-determination.

All of those factors are causing great frustration, which has accumulated during the years of siege and occupation. What we see before us presently, in terms of risks and dangers, clearly shows that attempts to bury one's head in the sand are liable to have great consequences. All those who believe that the Palestinian question does not have the same importance compared to other issues plaguing the region have exhibited poor judgement.

We reiterate that the call to end the occupation and to implement United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council, which is tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, is not aimed at delegitimizing any State. It is a call for the restoration of the rights-holders and for the implementation of international law. Ultimately, that would have beneficial and positive results for all the people throughout the region, including, of course, the Israeli people. We all recognize their right to live in peace and security within their borders and to enjoy good-neighbourly relations with the States in the region.

Historically, Egypt has been a pioneer in the restoration of peace in the region, and we commit ourselves to persevering in our efforts along that path with the two sides, Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, the recent visit to Cairo by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is part of the coordination between the two parties. The Egyptian authorities have reaffirmed their steadfast position, and call for reaching a comprehensive and just solution that will guarantee the right of the Palestinian people to build their independent State, on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital. The Egyptian Government has also affirmed that the Palestinian question remains an utmost priority for Egypt, and that reaching a settlement is indeed a basic premise for the restoration of security and stability in the Middle East and for lending new momentum to development in the region. We reaffirm that our efforts to relaunch negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis will continue, and that those efforts will also help to forge closer ties among Palestinians and help put an end to the divisions.

In conclusion, if I may, I would like to reaffirm that the historic call of the Arab States — the Arab Peace Initiative — clearly attests to the fact that Arab countries have collectively committed themselves to the land-for-peace principle as the framework and foundation for a solution. The recent Arab Summit held in Amman led to a reiteration by Heads of States and Governments of their support for that very same Arab Peace Initiative. We have further noted that the Administration of the United States of America is open to reaching a lasting settlement, which we applaud. In that regard, we stand ready to lend our assistance in that regard.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Let me join others in thanking Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and his tireless efforts on this issue. As he has set out so clearly this morning, the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories continues to be of the utmost concern for the Security Council. After generations of hostility, blood and tears and in the wake of years of pain and wars, we are determined to bring an end to the bloodshed and sorrow.

But such determination is not new. In fact, those words I just uttered come from the Washington Declaration, signed on this very day 23 years ago.

That historic document started a process that created a historic peace between Israel and Jordan, a peace that would have been unthinkable decades before. The symbolism of this particular anniversary should not be lost on anyone in the Council today. It should remind us all that the peace we seek is not impossible, no matter how far off it may appear, no matter the challenges ahead. It is a reminder of hope that the region desperately needs. One need look only to the recent abhorrent surge in violence to see that peace remains far from the minds of far too many.

I condemn the horrific terrorist attack that claimed the lives of three Israelis during a Shabbat dinner last Friday. I deplore the tragic murder of two Israeli policemen at the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif the Friday before. A spiral of tension and violence has swept across the West Bank and Jerusalem in recent days. I am deeply concerned about the loss of life, including the deaths of at least four Palestinians, and deplore the violence that left hundreds injured in clashes over the weekend. The relevant authorities must swiftly investigate all of those incidents.

We call on all parties to show restraint and restore calm. We call on all parties to avoid provocation and, through engagement, to reach a solution that ensures the safety and security of the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, one that upholds the status quo. We welcome the engagement between all parties to find a solution, and we welcome positive steps taken overnight. This is the path to de-escalation. This is the path all parties must take.

In parallel, we must not lose sight of other challenges to peace, such as the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the recent cut in electricity supplies is exacerbating already perilous conditions: over 30,000 persons displaced and insufficient clean water to meet the population's needs, with most only getting water for a few hours every three to five days. Over 70 per cent of Gazans are now reliant upon the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the United Nations for its efforts to alleviate the suffering of those in Gaza.

Ultimately, it is the decision of Hamas to choose violence and to reject the Quartet principles that lies at the heart of the tragedy in Gaza. There is a way out: Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept previously signed agreements. That means an end to the rockets, an end to the violence. Those countries in the region with influence over Hamas must encourage them to take these steps. We also need to see steps towards the restoration of the Palestinian Authority control of Gaza, and with it the restoration of effective and accountable governance. If we are to achieve a solution, Israel must lift restrictions on Gaza to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians. The United Kingdom stands ready to do all it can to support those efforts.

Beyond Gaza, we are also concerned at seeing settlement activity in East Jerusalem increasing, especially at a time of heightened tension. All settlements are illegal under international law, and I strongly condemn plans to build new settlement housing units. Many of those units are within Palestinian neighbourhoods, and some involve the demolition of Palestinian homes. That is unacceptable. I am also gravely concerned by proposals for the construction of a further 1,100 units between the West Bank settlements of Adam and Neve Yaakov. Settlements undermine the territorial contiguity of the West Bank and make a two-State solution harder to achieve.

There is a great deal for us to do if we are to make peace a reality. However, before concluding, let me return to the Washington Declaration. While the process that began on 25 July 1994 led to peace between Israel and Jordan, we should never forget the leadership shown by the United States, which was so instrumental in making that peace possible. It is that same leadership that President Trump and his Administration are now demonstrating in reinvigorating the Middle East peace process. That is to be applauded and supported. We call on the region as a whole. Israelis and Palestinians to seize the opportunity that such leadership offers, just as it was seized 23 years ago.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I wish to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. China also listened carefully to the statements by the observer of Palestine and by the representative of Israel.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue and the main source of problems in the region. It is also a gauge for international fairness and justice. The international community should proceed from the need to maintain peace and stability

in the Middle East and the world, maintain a long-term vision, promote a political settlement of the question of Palestine by addressing both the symptoms and the root causes of the conflict, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinian people, keep the situation between Palestine and Israel from getting out of control and prevent the Middle East from sliding into a broader crisis.

China is a staunch supporter of the just cause of the Palestinian people and an active mediator for peace between Palestine and Israel. Last week, China received a visit by President Abbas of Palestine. In his talks with President Abbas, President Xi Jinping made four proposals related to the promotion of the settlement of the question of Palestine under the new circumstances.

First, he emphasized the importance of a firmly advanced political settlement based on the two-State solution. The two-State solution best fits the reality on the ground and is the most universally accepted option. The parties concerned must continue to work on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. They must also persist in negotiations for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. China firmly supports the two-State solution and supports the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will, as always, play a constructive role for the settlement of the question of Palestine.

Secondly, President Xi Jinping proposed adopting the concept of common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security. Palestine and Israel are neighbours that cannot be separated. The security of the two countries requires them to cooperate, work together and support each other so as to build common security through joint efforts. China calls for the effective implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). There must be an immediate cessation of all settlement activities on the occupied territories and an immediate adoption of measures to prevent violence against civilians. We also call for an early resumption of peace talks in order to expedite a political solution to the question of Palestine, and thereby fundamentally achieve common and lasting security.

Thirdly, President Xi Jinping called for further coordinating the efforts of the international community and strengthening synergy in the interest of peace. For some time now, the international community has increased its attention regarding the question of Palestine. The parties concerned have conducted active diplomatic efforts to promote the relaunching of peace talks between Palestine and Israel. The international community should further strengthen coordination and come up with peace-promotion measures that entail joint participation. China is willing to join and support all efforts that are favourable to the political settlement of the question of Palestine. China plans to hold a workshop for peace activities in 2017 for Palestine and Israel in order to provide them with ideas for the settlement of the question of Palestine.

Fourthly, it is necessary to take integrated measures in order to promote peace via development. While promoting political talks, attention should be given to development, especially to the enhancement of the capacities of Palestine for economic development. China views both Palestine and Israel as important partners in the Belt Road initiative. China is willing to work under the concept of development for peace in order to promote Palestine and Israel in engaging in mutually beneficial cooperation, keep open channels for such cooperation and continue to support Palestine to expedite is development. That will help strengthen the basis of peace and harmony and reduce factors that disrupt the peace talks between the two sides.

China has announced an initiative to launch a tripartite dialogue mechanism among China, Palestine and Israel in order to coordinate the implementation of major projects of assistance for Palestine. The four proposals made by President Xi Jinping represent China's new endeavour relating to the settlement of the question of Palestine. It takes into account the current situation as well as the international environment. The proposals also represent the overall direction of China's efforts moving forward regarding the promotion of a political settlement. We hope that the proposals will be met with active responses and support from the parties concerned so that we can work together to achieve a breakthrough in the decades-long unresolved problem at hand.

Recently, the situation in Jerusalem has continued to worsen to the point of becoming extremely dangerous. The top priority now is to ease the tension and confrontations around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and achieve a settlement as soon as possible in order to reduce tension and avoid any escalation of the conflict. The Security Council and States in the region

need to carry out emergency diplomatic action and do their utmost to engage with the parties concerned in order to calm things down and avoid an escalation of tensions. Any escalation would cause even more serious consequences. The provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions must be implemented, including the provision that calls for upholding the historic status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem. We have taken note of the initiative taken by Israel today and we hope that the parties concerned will continue their dialogue and communication so as to re-establish calm at an early date.

China is willing to continue to work with all of the parties concerned to promote an early settlement of the current problems and the relaunching of peace talks between Palestine and Israel so as to realize at an early date a comprehensive, fair and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question and establish peace and stability in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon): Allow me to start by thanking Mr. Mladenov for his thorough briefing.

The difficult realities in the State of Palestine have been somberly summarized in a report by Human Rights Watch issued on the occasion of 50 years of Israeli occupation:

> "At least five categories of major violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law characterize the [Israeli] occupation: unlawful killings; forced displacement; abusive detention; the closure of the Gaza Strip and other unjustified restrictions on movement; and the development of settlements, along with the accompanying discriminatory policies that disadvantage Palestinians."

Lately, we were also reminded of the extent of the shocking Israeli practices in Jerusalem and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound: killings, closure and the disproportionate use of force against worshipers and civilians, which constituted a clear attempt to escalate an occupation into a war of religions. Those practices are not only blatant violations of the Charter of the United Nations, principles of international law and resolutions adopted by the Security Council — and in particular of article 4 of The Hague Convention, article 39 of the Geneva Convention and article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights — to respect peoples' rights to observe and practice their own religion. Suffice it to say, these are deliberate attempts to create new realities on the ground that make the two-State solution an objective that is practically impossible to achieve. It is time to hold Israel accountable and to compel it to cease and rescind all measures to tamper with the historic status quo at the Al-Aqsa mosque and its Esplanade.

Today the international community should be biased to upholding the principles of international law. It is high time to turn our commitment to the principle of land for peace into reality by ending the Israeli occupation and heeding the calls for peace and implementing the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted in my country, Lebanon, in 2002, and reiterated by several summits and meetings, the latest being the Arab Summit hosted by Jordan in March.

Turning to my country, since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), there has not been a single day during which Israel has not continued to breach Lebanon's sovereignty by land and sea, in total disrespect of its obligation under resolution 1701 (2006). Let me mention only the daily violations of Lebanese airspace by Israeli fighter jets. Despite all such flagrant violations, multiple smear campaigns, false allegations and threats by Israel to send my country back to the dark ages, the Government of Lebanon remains firm in its commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), not only to preserve the gains of our collective investment in security and stability, but rather to multiply them.

It is in that context that my Government yet again encourages the Secretary-General to expedite his good-offices efforts and looks forward to receiving the results of the efforts of the Special Coordinator on the delineation of the disputed maritime border and exclusive economic zone between Lebanon and Israel, while emphasizing that the non-resolution of this issue shall remain a source of conflict that threatens peace and security in our region.

Furthermore, my Government will also submit a request to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year without any changes. Only a capable and efficient UNIFIL can maintain stability and security in the south of Lebanon, in particular in the light of the volatile

situation in region. As for the partnership between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its deep appreciation to all troop-contributing countries — a good number of them are around the table today or otherwise present in the Chamber — for their sacrifices and noble determination to protect civilians and to ensure full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty.

Our meeting today coincides with the visit of the President of the Council of Ministers to Washington, D.C., which was preceded by visits to the European Union and other friendly countries, with the sole objective of emphasizing the economic, social and security challenges facing my country and, most important, to reiterate our calls to assist Lebanon in its efforts to address the situation of refugees and their host communities and to strengthen the LAF capabilities in its commendable fight against terrorism.

All of those efforts are deeply rooted in the importance of protecting and preserving Lebanon as a model for the region: promising democracy, a liberal system, leadership in combating terrorism and a beacon of diversity and coexistence in a region raging with fear and exclusion. Let right prevail in the Middle East and for its peoples.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your able and wise leadership of the Security Council throughout the month of July. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his very in-depth briefing.

The Council is meeting today in the light of the grave events that recently took place in the Middle East. Some States in the region are undergoing deep-rooted crises to which a political and humanitarian solution has not been found. Other countries are wracked by terrorism, while still others do not have the financial capacity to help their citizens when they are in dire need. The dangerous situation at the Holy Esplanade and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque is escalating tensions and risks exacerbating the crisis, threatening to plunge us into an era of despair and allowing extremists to use the situation to their own nefarious ends to further undermine peace across the broader region beyond Israel and Palestine.

Jordan would like to warn about the potential repercussions of what has been happening recently — and continues to happen — in Jerusalem, which could lead to a destabilization of the region and constitutes a serious threat to peace. That could have a devastating impact on the region and could plunge us into a religious war, which would open the doors to further terrorism and exploitation of the roots of the conflict for criminal practices, and not just in our region but beyond. In order to address those tensions, a number of emergency measures will need to be taken.

First, Israel must respect the historic and legal status quo and must allow for full and immediate access by worshippers to Al-Aqsa Mosque, without any restrictions. It must also put an end to its unilateral measures to impose a new reality on the ground in the region, which are a violation of its international legal obligations as the occupying Power.

Secondly, the international community must shoulder its responsibilities and put an end to the tensions by respecting the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites and by compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the legal obligations incumbent upon it.

Thirdly, the international community must unite its efforts, including within the Security Council, to prevent an escalation of the violence and prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. It must do so by tackling the deep-rooted causes that have led to this tension, as well as recent events, including steps taken by Israel to change the situation and conditions on the ground.

More must be done to put an end to tension, to restore peace and to prevent a deterioration of the situation. Jordan is working to those ends. We are also working in order to ensure that the holy sites are fully accessible. We will continue our efforts with our partners and our friends. Under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, we will not let up in our diplomatic efforts. As the Custodian and sponsor of Muslim and Christian holy places in East Jerusalem, he will continue to take all the necessary steps to ensure that the holy sites are respected, to guarantee peace and to ensure that conditions conducive to peace and stability are in place. Such steps will be taken with the

overarching goal of resolving the conflict on the basis of a two-State solution.

I would like to underscore the appeal made by Jordan that an emergency ministerial-level meeting of Arab States be conveyed to consider possible pathways and courses of action to respond to this issue. As the historic Hashemite Custodian and sponsor of Muslim and Christian holy places in East Jerusalem, Jordan will continue its efforts to rebuff any attempt to undermine the holy character of these sites. We will stand firm against any act of aggression and any attempt to try to cut of access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque or the entire Esplanade of mosques. We will do so through all legal and diplomatic means at our disposal. We will in no way let up in our tireless efforts and determination to find a solution to this conflict. The lack of such a solution would cause us to remain in the vicious cycle of violence and instability, would prevent people from living in peace and prosperity and would not allow us to realize the future that the peoples of the region deserve.

In the light of other events that have taken place in the region, Jordan would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that putting an end to the Syrian crisis will require a comprehensive political solution that guarantees peace and stability and the unity of Syrian territory. We have spared no effort in terms of our participation in the political efforts under way to put an end to the deaths and violence in Syria. As such, together with the United States and the Russian Federation, we have been able to put together an agreement to support the ceasefire and to put an end to the escalation of violence in south-west Syria. That is a crucial step towards reaching a complete cessation of hostilities in order to usher in stability in Syria. It is also a key step towards a political solution that will preserve the territorial integrity, the freedom, the independence and the sovereignty of Syria.

We would like to reiterate our determination to tackle terrorism and to destroy terrorist organizations and their affiliates. In that regard, we reiterate that the region will not know security and stability without the eradication of terrorist organizations, which lead people astray and employ what should be peaceful, religious principles and beliefs for their own nefarious ends.

We would like to congratulate our Iraqi brethren for their recent success, with the support of international forces, in wresting control of Mosul from the clutches of Da'esh. We also reiterate our full support to Iraq and to its people as they seek to rebuild the city and their country and bring about stability. We also appeal for national reconciliation in Iraq in order to preserve the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of that brotherly country and to ensure that it can build upon what has been achieved thus far.

In addition, we support the efforts and actions of the international coalition and the international community to support the legitimate Government in Yemen to put an end to the crisis on the basis of implementation mechanism, the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference and resolution 2216 (2015).

In conclusion, we reiterate that more needs to be done to address the core issue in the Middle East, that is, the question of Palestine, which must be dealt with in order to resolve all other issues in the region. Indeed, a lasting, fair and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis is key to unlocking the other crises in the region. That is why we must make serious efforts to put an end to what appears to be an insurmountable crisis that has dragged on for far too long, so as to address Palestinian and Israeli concerns and resume direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine that usher in lasting peace. In doing so, we must take into account all final-status issues related to key national interests, including those overseen by Jordan.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Estrada Meyer (Brazil): I thank the delegation of China for convening this important debate. I also thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his informative briefing. We believe that the United Nations as a whole — and the Security Council in particular — has a leading responsibility in seeking sustainable solutions for the complex and prolonged conflicts affecting the Middle East.

As the Security Council prepares to discuss the annual renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), allow me to stress the vital role played by UNIFIL in maintaining peace and stability in a vulnerable region. A particularly relevant component of the mission is its Maritime Task Force (MTF), which we have had the honour and responsibility of leading for over six years now. The MTF has successfully performed key security and humanitarian activities, ranging from the seizing arms, ammunition and illegal drugs to rescuing migrants and

refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. The Task Force also contributes to regional economic development by establishing a safer environment for maritime trade. Its core assignments — to prevent violations of the arms embargo and to train members of the Lebanese Navy — contribute to the maintenance of calm and stability in the region and remain as indispensable as ever.

The continued significance of the MTF was confirmed by the latest report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006):

> "[t]he UNIFIL Maritime Task Force has proved its operational effectiveness in its maritime interdiction operations at the request of the Government of Lebanon. [...] Those operations are a significant deterrent against the illegal entry of weapons or related materiel. Daily interaction and exercises with the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy have helped develop the Navy." (*S/2017/591, para. 70*)

It is imperative to ensure that UNIFIL and the MTF continue to enjoy the strong political support of the Security Council, as well as adequate resources to carry out their mandate. That will be especially important in the context of considering the proposals from the strategic review conducted by the Secretariat earlier this year.

Turning to the question of Palestine, a highly symbolic milestone was reached last month: the fiftieth anniversary of the ongoing occupation of East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank. During the recently held United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation, Brazil expressed its deep regret that the Palestinian right to a sovereign and independent State has not yet been fulfilled — almost 70 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and 50 years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

The recent electricity crisis in Gaza is yet another reminder of the severe social, economic and humanitarian consequences of the occupation. Brazil has consistently underscored that the two-State solution is the only just and acceptable solution to the conflict, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized and mutually agreed borders. As stressed by the Secretary-General,

> "[r]esolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remove a driver of violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East and open the doors to cooperation, security, prosperity and human rights for all." (*SG/SM/18595-GA/PAL/1389*)

We are deeply concerned about the recent incidents of violence in East Jerusalem. We regret all loss of life and call on all parties to reduce tensions and avoid further escalation.

Recent developments concerning the crisis in Syria continue to demand the attention of the Security Council. It is key that the political dimension of the negotiations on Syria — the Geneva process — and the security initiatives encompassed by the Astana process continue to advance hand in hand. Strengthening the ceasefire regime is a fundamental component of international efforts to find a political resolution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), including the commitments to the unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character of Syria. In that regard, we took note with interest of the memorandum that creates four de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed last May, as well as the recent announcement by Russia, the United States and Jordan of measures to stabilize some of those regions. Such security measures create positive momentum and make it ever-more essential to advance on the political track. We need to ensure that the de-escalation zones serve as a step towards peace and the alleviation of the humanitarian situation.

Brazil reiterates its deep concern with regard to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We highlight the need for a full, impartial and comprehensive investigation of all reported incidents, such as those at Khan Shaykhun and Um-Housh, including visits to all the relevant sites.

Lastly, with regard to Iraq, Brazil congratulated the Government of Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi and the Iraqi people on the liberation of Mosul, announced on 10 July. That was a milestone in the fight against international terrorism, as well as a decisive step towards consolidating security, stability and the territorial integrity of the country. Many challenges remain in ensuring the safe and dignified return of displaced persons and extending State authority and the rule of law in the liberated areas. We hope that important victory will be followed by a successful

process of reconstruction, economic recovery and national reconciliation in Iraq.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the consent of the members of the Security Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8011 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8011th meeting

Tuesday, 25 July 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana
	Egypt	Mr. Tayel
	Ethiopia	Mrs. Yusuf
	France	Ms. Charrier
	Italy	Mr. Carlucci
	Japan	Mr. Takeda
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Kermkulov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Volgarev
	Senegal	Ms. Gueye
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Ilnytskyi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kinna
	United States of America	Mr. Ward
	Uruguay	Ms. García Moyano

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We thank the Chinese presidency for having organized this open debate.

Every time we meet here to discuss the situation in the Middle East, we are constrained to lament it further. The spiralling violence, the looming humanitarian catastrophe, the untold pain and human suffering are surely not sustainable. And nothing epitomizes this better than the plight of the Palestinian people, who, for the past 70 years, have suffered dispossession, displacement and deprivation at the hands of the occupation forces.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the illegal occupation of their homeland, it is unfortunate that the aspirations of the Palestinians to live a life of freedom and dignity remain a distant and elusive ideal.

The escalating tensions and violent clashes that have taken place in and around the Old City of Jerusalem during the past few days are a reminder of the fact that we are sitting on a tinderbox. As the Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, has rightly noted, the fallout from events taking place over a few hundred square metres affects hundreds of millions of people around the world. These people have only one demand: that the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the status of Jerusalem be respected.

While the Security Council has taken cognizance of the gravity of the situation, words must be complemented by concrete actions. Israel must not only take immediate steps to defuse the situation, but also desist from taking any provocative measures in future.

A viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters and the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only sustainable guarantee of enduring peace in the Middle East. There is nothing more inimical to this vision than the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Yet there has been a substantial increase in settlement-related activities in the occupied lands.

This trend is emblematic of the blatant Israeli disregard for international law and the collective will of the international community, including resolution 2334 (2016). It is also a setback for peace and a retreat from the two-State solution to a one-State illusion.

Meanwhile, in its eleventh year, the suffocating Israeli blockade of Gaza is not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a moral outrage. The region can reap the dividends of peace only if such peace is predicated on the foundation of justice, an imperative that demands an end to illegal Israeli occupation and the realization of the legitimate Palestinian aspiration to statehood. A just solution for Palestine is not just a matter of regional significance; it is a primary precondition for global peace and security.

We are also concerned that the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are facing serious resource constraints, hindering the commendable work that UNRWA is doing for Palestinian refugees.

The fight against terrorism in the Middle East has been long-drawn and protracted. Wars and foreign occupations have compounded these challenges. The liberation of Mosul is an important milestone in Iraq's fight against Da'esh and its affiliates and, we are confident, towards an inclusive Iraqi State, recognizing and reconciling the interests of the Iraqi people.

The intra-Syrian talks are central to the process of political reconciliation in that country. Successive rounds of talks have yet to deliver a major breakthrough, but the parties, major Powers and the international community in general must persist, for a military solution is neither achievable nor sustainable.

Finally, what we need for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is firm resolve, concerted action and, above all, justice and the rule of law. This can be achieved only when all sides are willing to make difficult choices. We hope that we are willing to take that test.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian

question. We are also grateful for the briefing provided by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

However, we deplore the ongoing deterioration of the situation on the ground, including the recent events that took place in connection with the mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem. Peru reiterates its appeal to all of the parties directly involved to temper their actions and to move towards a constructive dialogue in a framework of respect for international law and humanitarian law.

Since 1947, the year in which Peru joined the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, our position on this issue has been clear and unchanged. Peru supports the two-State solution, with secure and mutually agreed borders, as the basis for peaceful coexistence. In that regard, Peru encourages and supports the various initiatives carried out by the international community, which are aimed at resolving the Palestinian question and would allow for the implementation of the agreements reached in Madrid and Oslo. Peru believes that renewing the commitment to resuming peace talks on the basis of the two-State solution at the summit of the League of Arab States is a positive step forward. Likewise, it believes that the visit undertaken by the President of the United States of America to the region on his first trip abroad could foster the conditions necessary for a resumption of the political dialogue. We also highlight the good offices of various European and Asian States.

Peru emphasizes the importance of complying with resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in December 2016, which urges Israel to cease settlement building in the territories it has occupied since 1967. That practice, which has become more intense in recent months, is contrary to international law and poses a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and to the prospect of the two-State solution.

In addition, Peru recognizes Israel's inalienable right to preserve its own security and existence, including by exercising its legitimate right to self-defence, while emphasizing that it must do so under the principles of proportionality and legality. In accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), Peru strongly condemns the commission of terrorist acts against the civilian population and the motivations of the perpetrators of such acts.

Peru notes with concern the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The extreme divisions among Palestinian leaders themselves, along with the scarcity of basic services and restrictive measures imposed by Israel, lead to despair, a greater proclivity for hate speech and additional and more serious outbreaks of violence. There is an urgent need for the international community to provide greater support to those who face such a tragic situation.

The scant progress made in the peace process and growing differences make it imperative for the international community to address the Palestinian question with a renewed sense of urgency. The United Nations and the Security Council, in particular, have a very important role to play. As a non-permanent member of the Council in 2018 and 2019, Peru will continue to support the facilitation of a minimum framework of understanding for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties and to improve the situation on the ground.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for having convened today's open debate.

Argentina has always maintained a principled position in favour of resolving disputes and conflicts by peaceful means; respect for international law, sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of States; the rejection of the acquisition of territories by force; and confidence in the constructive role and persuasive power of the international community in order to pave the way for peaceful, just and lasing solutions to conflicts.

The situation in the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian question, has been addressed by the Security Council since 1947 and remains one of the longest-running and most intractable conflicts on the international agenda. In the light of that situation, we should ask ourselves what we can do as members of the international community to help find a just and lasting solution within the framework of the Council. In that regard, Argentina believes that overcoming differences is a priority so that the parties can resume negotiations. My country strongly supports all efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East, both in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in the no less serious situations in other countries of the region.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of historic resolution 242 (1967), we again reiterate our firm support for a peaceful, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-State solution, based on 1967 borders and on what was agreed by the parties during the negotiations process. Argentina reaffirms its support for the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and viable State, recognized by the entire international community, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Similarly, Argentina reiterates its concern about the persistent and continued construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and calls for an end to their expansion, as set out in resolution 2334 (2016), adopted by the Council in December 2016. The international community, as a whole, has made it very clear that the settlements are contrary to international law, hamper peace, weaken the prospect of a two-State solution, with both States living in peace and security, and therefore perpetuates an untenable status quo. We also believe that it is necessary for Palestinian leaders to earnestly address Israeli security concerns. Argentina believes that it is unacceptable for Hamas and other Palestinian groups to carry out attacks against Israeli civilians. My country strongly condemns all terrorist acts.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and rejects any unilateral measure aimed at changing it. My country believes that the holy city should be a place of assembly and peace, and that the members of the three major monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — should be guaranteed free access to the holy sites.

Regrettably, over the past few days the security situation in the city of Jerusalem has deteriorated considerably. The Republic of Argentina is concerned about the spike in violence and repudiates the slew of acts that have claimed the lives of several Palestinian citizens and members of the Israeli security forces. The escalation of fanaticism and the violence that ensues cannot be allowed to undermine the right of societies to live in peace and freedom, in full enjoyment of their civil rights. Our country therefore believes that none of the parties should take unilateral measures that could affect the status quo.

Unfortunately, that is not the only issue that concerns us in the Middle East. Argentina notes with concern developments in the situation in Syria, in particular the humanitarian situation and condemns all acts of violence, particularly those targeting the civilian population. Our country rejects terrorism in all its forms and condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist activity of the organization that refers to itself as the Islamic State, and the Al-Nusra Front.

We also strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons in any situation, under any circumstances and by any actor. We also firmly believe that all those responsible for their use should be brought to justice. In that regard, we support the impartial and technical work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Argentina supports a political solution in Syria, through dialogue and diplomacy, as well as respect for international law and the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We therefore attach particular importance to the negotiations in Geneva and Astana. Considerable progress has been made because these two initiatives complement each other. We also welcome the agreement reached between the United States, the Russian Federation and Jordan on 9 July to bring about a ceasefire in south-eastern Syria.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, we are pleased to note that the Iraqi army has recently retaken control of Mosul. We regret the many lives lost as a result of the terrorist acts carried out by the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

We would also like to make mention of the crisis among the countries of the Gulf, which is a new source of tension in the region and cause of concern for our country. Argentina hopes that all of the parties involved, with whom we have close cooperation links, can find a solution, through dialogue and diplomatic negotiations. We support Kuwait's mediation efforts and the initiatives taken by various actors within the international community to improve relations among the parties. We call for restraint and stress that all decisions and actions should be in line with international law to prevent an escalation of the situation and any social and economic consequences that would have an adverse effect on the civilian population. We condemn terrorism in all its forms and view it as a common enemy that we must defeat.

Peace in the Middle East will be possible only through greater diplomatic efforts and negotiation. The Council should spare no effort in encouraging the parties concerned in that direction, consistent with the parameters recognized by the international community in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, a two-State solution based on agreements between the parties, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as a mutually acceptable solution to the situation in Jerusalem and a just settlement of the refugee issue.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands is central to every conflict in the Middle East. That injustice has continued for more than seven decades and has been exacerbated by Israeli expansionism and aggressive policies towards the Palestinians and the region. Any attempt to exclude the issue from Security Council debates is simply a denial of obvious facts and the suffering of innocent people.

The Israeli regime's entire history has been defined by acts of aggression towards its neighbours and other countries in the Middle East and beyond that have occurred at least 14 times since 1948. Emboldened by the support of the new United States Administration, the Israeli authorities have been questioning and challenging the Palestinians' inalienable right to their homelands as never before. That aggression has continued on a daily basis, the latest episode being a brutal crackdown on the oppressed nation of Palestine under the pretext of preventing Palestinian worshippers from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli regime has continued to arrogantly and flagrantly violate dozens of Security Council resolutions, from resolution 54 (1948) to resolution 2334 (2016), as well as many other resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and specialized United Nations agencies on illegal settlement activities. The violations are made possible by the international community's irresponsible granting of total impunity to the regime.

Israel also continues to flout all the international regimes designed to govern weapons of mass destruction by refusing to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention. The nuclear weapons in its hands represent the most serious threat there is to the security of every State in the Middle East. World Powers, especially the United States, are undermining the stabilization and counter-terrorism efforts that they claim to champion by dumping untold amounts of beautiful military equipment in the hands of irresponsible State and non-State actors in the service of adventurist projections of power. The profits that these wealthy countries reap from such transfers have come at a tremendous cost to the region's security and its people.

The United States and its allies are bombing Syria and Yemen, using cluster munitions or enforcing blockades of humanitarian aid under the guise of restoring legitimacy. Such actions are the seeds of new conflicts. The world remembers vividly how the last United States invasion in the Middle East, launched on false pretences based on allegations of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, resulted in the deaths of more than half a million people in Iraq and in the rebirth of Da'esh. When is the Council is going to seek accountability for those who created and support the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Da'esh and its affiliated groups, or for their role in the proliferation of terrorist activities in the Middle East and around the globe?

Iran has always supported efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict diplomatically and has advocated for the self-determination of the Syrian people. Our assistance to the Syrian Government is geared towards counter-terrorism and de-escalation. Our participation in the Astana, International Syria Support Group and Geneva processes is testament to that. We continue to welcome any genuine effort to help stabilize the situation on the ground, as a prerequisite for any political process that will enable the Syrian people to decide their own future.

Today we heard some unsubstantiated allegations about my country that I categorically reject as part of the misinformation and propaganda campaign against Iran that has been designed and perpetrated with hysteria by Israel and various countries of the region, including some that wholeheartedly supported Saddam Hussein's aggression against Iran.

I would like to conclude on a rare happy note by offering our heartfelt congratulations to the brave people and Government of Iraq on the liberation of

Mosul from the takfiri Da'esh terrorist group that has wreaked havoc not only in Iraq but in the entire region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: The candidate country Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East peace process remains a key priority for the European Union (EU), whose positions have not changed. We see no viable alternative to a negotiated two-State solution that fulfils the legitimate aspirations of both parties — including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty — and that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent status issues. Resolution 2334 (2016), while reaffirming all of the Council's relevant previous resolutions since 1967, reiterated the key threats to the viability of the two-State solution, notably the continued Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It also clearly condemned acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement or destruction.

The latest developments in and around the Old City of Jerusalem and in the West Bank pose a real risk of further escalation. Three Palestinians were killed during violent clashes with Israeli security forces on Friday. These incidents must be fully investigated. In a terror attack in the West Bank during the night of Friday and Saturday, three Israelis were murdered at their Shabbat dinner table by a young Palestinian. Nothing can justify such a despicable crime. Since then, there have been further attacks in Israel and Jordan, and two Jordanians have lost their lives. The EU strongly condemns acts of terror, expresses its regret for all the losses of innocent life caused by the violence and hopes for a speedy recovery for the wounded.

We appreciated President Abbas's condemnation of the attack on Israeli police officers in the Old City of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions, and the assurances by Prime Minister Netanyahu that the status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount will be preserved. It is now vital to ensure that all political, religious and community leaders act responsibly, restore calm and avoid any acts or rhetoric that could further increase tensions. Continued cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is crucially important if we are to prevent further violence and loss of life. We encourage Israel and Jordan to work together to find solutions and ensure security for all, respect the sanctity of the holy site and uphold the status quo, noting the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom, as recognized in its peace treaty with Israel.

The EU also strongly opposes the recent Israeli decisions to proceed with plans for thousands of settlement units in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and stresses the Security Council's repeated demand that Israel cease all settlement activities immediately and completely. Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace, and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

The EU has been following the worsening situation in Gaza. We commend the efforts by the United Nations and Egypt to mediate and provide and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and fuel to the Gaza Strip. The EU will continue to provide humanitarian and development assistance to Gaza. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over Gaza, is critical for achieving a viable Palestinian State.

The EU stands ready to support all serious peacemaking efforts. We welcome ongoing United States efforts and those of the Quartet, including the holding of a meeting of envoys on 13 July. We recall the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides key elements for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Let me turn to Lebanon and the endorsement of a new electoral law by the Parliament on 16 June, on the basis of which parliamentary elections will take place by May 2018. Conducting peaceful, fair and transparent parliamentary elections will be key to ensuring the functioning of Lebanese democratic institutions. In last week's Association Council between the EU and Lebanon, the EU recognized Lebanon's extraordinary and exceptional effort in hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees. We are committed to maintaining the level of our support in 2018 and 2019. The EU and Lebanon agreed that the only sustainable long-term solution for refugees and displaced persons from Syria

into Lebanon is their safe return to their country of origin in accordance with all norms of international humanitarian law, while taking into account the interests of the host countries, as conditions for such a return are met.

In Syria, we hope that the implementation of de-escalation arrangements towards a nation-wide cessation of hostilities and unhindered humanitarian access will help facilitate the intra-Syrian talks under United Nations auspices in Geneva. Thus far, Damascus has refused to engage substantially in those negotiations. The EU continues to call for full, unhindered humanitarian access and for accountability for all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The EU has just allocated €1.5 million to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. Only when a credible transition is firmly under way will the EU be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

In Iraq, the liberation of Mosul was a highly symbolic step in the defeat of Da'esh, although it does not mark the end of military operations. Several very sensitive areas remain to be recovered from Da'esh. But even then, the territorial defeat of Da'esh is only one of the challenges. Winning the peace with the population is an equally challenging and urgent task for the Iraqi Government. The EU calls on the federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to build on their successful security cooperation in the campaign to liberate Mosul and engage in a constructive dialogue on all issues across the political and economic spectrum, including the disputed internal boundaries. Unilateral steps must be avoided.

Lastly, Iraq is in need of international support to face all these huge challenges. The EU is committed to providing such support and is stepping up its efforts. More than €200 million is programmed for 2017. A Common Security and Defence Policy mission will be deployed to advise and assist in the reform of the security sector, as well as in delivering on humanitarian needs and stabilization.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We have repeatedly underlined at the Security Council that the Israeli-Palestine conflict remains the core challenge to lasting and regional peace. The recent developments in Jerusalem should remind all of us that we should never lose sight of that fact. In that regard, we regret all loss of life and condemn all violence.

The immediate priority must be a rapid de-escalation and exercise of restraint by all parties. We should not see this as another perennial round of skirmishes and stand idle until the situation calms down. At the same time, we all should acknowledge the importance of the preservation of the historic status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif for the Islamic world. Attempts to change the status quo jeopardize peaceful coexistence. Jerusalem, a city sacred to Islam, Judaism and Christianity, should be treated with the utmost respect. The closure of Al-Haram Al-Sharif for days and the subsequent decision to place metal detectors at its entrances along with other restrictions on Muslims's entry there are unacceptable. Those mistakes, as well as the disproportionate use of force against Palestinians who were on the streets for prayers, cannot be justified by any means.

We expect Israel to listen to the calls of the international community, fulfil its legal obligations as the occupying Power in East Jerusalem and lift all the restrictions that limit access to Al-Haram Al Sharif. In that regard, Israel's decision to remove the metal detectors was a step in the right direction. Return to the status quo in its full letter and spirit is essential for the restoration of calm. This is a matter of freedom of religion and worship.

The grim situation reflects the far-reaching effects of the absence of real hope for peace. Only a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital can ensure peace and security for both sides. In that regard, measures in contravention of international law, in particular settlement activities, which are an obstacle to the two-State solution, must be discontinued.

To reach a lasting peace, it is also important for the Palestinians to voice their legitimate demands in unity. Turkey is determined to continue to carry out its efforts to that end and supports the initiatives that respect the established parameters, including the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Fully aware of the dire humanitarian situation in Palestine, especially in Gaza, Turkey also continues

its efforts to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians through development assistance and reconstruction projects. The third Turkish shipment of 10.000 tons of humanitarian aid reached Gaza in June. While working on possible ways to remedy the grave scarcity of water and electricity in Gaza, Turkey has allocated $500,000 to the occupied Palestinian territory Humanitarian Fund for the purchase of emergency fuel to maintain the delivery of essential services in response to the appeal of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Furthermore, we continue to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East given its essential role in the lives of Palestine refugees.

Since the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, Turkey has undertaken intensive efforts to end the violence in Syria and reach a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). While a genuine political transition is the only way to end the Syrian conflict, negotiations to that end cannot bear fruit if the fighting continues. For that reason, we facilitated and became the guarantors of a nationwide ceasefire with the Russian Federation and Iran. The Astana meetings, which are complementary and supportive to the United Nations-led Geneva political process, aim at strengthening the ceasefire and adopting confidence-building measures.

At the fourth round of high-level meetings held in Astana on 3 and 4 May, a memorandum on the establishment of de-escalation areas in certain parts of Syria was adopted. Issues related to the delineation of the de-escalation areas, as well as to their administration will be finalized by the joint working group formed among the three guarantors. The significant reduction of violence achieved on the ground has established an environment conducive to holding the last three rounds of the Geneva talks. The opposition once again demonstrated political maturity and demonstrated its credibility by engaging in real talks, as well as increased the interaction among various groups. The regime's representatives should not be allowed to continue their intransigent stance and poison the upcoming talks with both violations on the ground and harmful rhetoric at the table.

Only a multidimensional strategy can achieve the dual objectives of eliminating terrorism and stabilizing Syria. Turkey's resolve to fight Da'esh and other terrorist organizations such as the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units remains firm. Unilateral steps threatening the unity, the territorial integrity and the demographic structure of Syria and efforts to seek territorial expansion for political leverage are unacceptable. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes that were made in Manbij, only this time, in Raqqa. Together with its partners, Turkey will continue its efforts to address the plight of the Syrian people and find a solution to the conflict that will meet their legitimate aspirations.

We would like to congratulate the Iraqi security forces for their success in liberating Mosul from Da'esh. We are confident that permanent peace and stability in Iraq will be achieved through inclusive national reconciliation. Unilateral moves that challenge Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity will only additionally lead to instability and entail negative consequences.

In the near future, Turkey is ready to contribute to the reconstruction efforts of Mosul and to the elimination of the conditions that led to the emergence of Da'esh and other radical organizations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Ms. Scott (Namibia): Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of your country, China, of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July 2017, and thank you for organizing the debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

These five decades of occupation in Palestine have seen ongoing violence in seemingly unending cycles. Our debate here in the Security Council keeps us focused on seeking a peaceful resolution to this complex situation. During the United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation, held on 29 and 30 June under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Secretary-General was on point when he stated that, by bringing an end to this conflict situation, a major driver of violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East

region would be removed. There are few who would disagree. Indeed, the Secretary-General's call must be taken as a call for a return to direct negotiation to resolve the status issues contained in United Nations resolutions, agreements and international law, and also by resolutely establishing the two-State solution as a basis for peace.

Namibia calls on Israel to comply with Security Council resolutions and to implement agreements it has reached on the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders. Namibia has stood alongside the rest of the United Nations membership in calling for peace and dialogue in order to seek a just solution to the question of statehood in Palestine. Namibia therefore welcomes the decision of Israel to withdraw the metal detectors, and calls for respect for the holy sites in Jerusalem. Namibia also calls on Israel to desist from building settlements in violation of previous agreements and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which is a continued affront to the dignity and property ownership of the Palestinian people.

Namibia is also apprehensive about the continued tensions which seem to be causing dangerous and global polarization and violent extremism. The conflicts in Syria and Yemen, coupled with terrorism across the Middle East, are causing untold suffering and a humanitarian crisis equivalent to some of the worst this world has seen. We urge all parties in the Middle East to work with seriousness to silence the war drums.

Once again, we call on the Israeli Government to end its ongoing punitive destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, and to cease its illegal construction of settlements on occupied territory. We call on all parties to move towards rather than away from the tables of dialogue and compromise in order to seek a just peace and solution to the conflict. Namibia once again calls for Israel's complete an unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We urge the international community to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders.

Namibia stands with the people of Palestine in their determined efforts for the pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination, justice, freedom and independence through political, diplomatic, peaceful and non-violent means. We call on all other States Members of the United Nations to support any deliberation that would result in an end to half a century of occupation, to see the Palestinian people exercising their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and as a rightful member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): The delegation of Indonesia is pleased to join this Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing.

This year, we mark the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. But it is no happy anniversary. Day by day, the blockade of Gaza, the illegal Wall in the West Bank, the aggressive illegal settlement expansions, the collective punishment being inflicted on Palestinians, the perpetual use of violence, the rejection of the self-determination of the Palestinian people, and their lack of access to natural resources all continue to worsen the situation on the ground. As a result, the conflict poses a continuing threat to international peace and security. In that regard, members of the international community should commit to pursue a just and lasting solution, one that the two-State solution envisages.

Today, once again, we reaffirm our faith in resolution 2334 (2016) of December 2016, and call for its full and unfettered implementation. One should recall that, in the quest to eliminate obstacles on the road to peace, the Council in its wisdom has rejected Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. It has declared the settlements not simply to be illegal and a flagrant violation of international law, but also a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Regrettably, not only has Israel continued to defy the Council, but we, as Member States, have yet to receive the substantive published report of the Secretary-General concerning the implementation of the resolution. We join all those who believe that this is a minimum standard in moving forward.

It is matter of record that just three months after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), the Government

of Israel announced the construction of the first new settlement in two decades in Emek Shilo in the West Bank, as if to challenge the Council. Nonetheless, as we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the occupation here at the United Nations last month, it was remarkable to observe the increased interaction among stakeholders, particularly between Palestinian and Israeli youth, and greater support not only from the younger Jewish community within the United States and Israel. We believe this is a good sign for the future. We strongly believe that Palestinian children deserve the same right to be free in their own land, no less than the Israeli children in their land.

We need to continue our support for the Palestinians so they are not left behind, hence the importance of supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its work, including ensuring continued resources.

It is a matter of great significance that this debate follows yet another unmasking of a new face of Israeli aggression on Palestinians in the occupied territory, in the form of the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Essentially, any attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque is to be considered a very dangerous red line. The Government and people of Indonesia strongly condemn it, as we do any act of aggression capable of harming any holy site. The closure of Al-Aqsa not only worsens the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, it signals to the world how strongly Israel wishes to distance itself from the two-State solution. The closure of Al-Aqsa constitutes a blatant move of Israel in its continuing effort to alter the geographic and demographic character of Jerusalem.

The international community must prevail over the attempts by the occupation force to alter the status quo in the Holy City, in violation of its international and humanitarian law. The closure is a flagrant violation of the freedom of religion and the right to pray. Continuous efforts to curtail and hamper the ability of worshippers to enter the mosque not only contradict all the basic tenet of decency, but will also worsen the situation, not only in Jerusalem but in the rest of the world. It will create more division and mistrust and further animosity that will lead to radicalism and extremism. My delegation therefore urges all sides to make an honest effort to reduce tensions, restore calm, end the crisis and seek a solution that would ensure public safety and the security of the site, while maintaining the status quo of the Holy City.

If need be, the international community could explore the possibility of ensuring that the holy Mosque of Al-Aqsa remains under United Nations international protection and supervision so as to ensure that all worshippers are able to conduct their religious activities in peace and harmony. We have to ensure that an international mechanism exists to forestall any recurrence of impulsive actions by Israel, such as the closure of the holy Mosque.

Although my delegation will not condone the use of violence, but we also cannot — and I repeat, cannot — tolerate the systemic violation and abuse of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to observe their religious practices and the very existence of their dignity as human beings. No human rights are human rights, unless and until the occupying Power yields to the Palestinians their human rights. In that regard, I once again say that enough is enough.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the message that, unless there is a genuine intention by Israel to find a lasting two-State solution, we will continue to have countless crises on our hands. The world cannot survive ever-more crises. Do we have to wait another 50 years to see a free and independent Palestine? Like any peace-loving country with a conscience and a measure of humanity, Indonesia will remain relentless in its support for the Palestinian cause.

Finally, it is sad to see the reality of Palestinian lives in Jerusalem. People have lost children, families, belongings and lands. Now, they have lost the right to pray in the most holy of mosques. What more is left of human dignity?

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank the Chinese presidency for having arranged such an important open debate. We would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his very important briefing to the Security Council.

We echo the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as the statement delivered by the representative of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today's periodic meeting is taking place at a time when sad events have recently occurred. We have seen

an unfortunate escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem — an escalation in the situation that has served to raise awareness among the international community. Given the will of Israel to transform the conflict into a religious conflict and the arbitrary and constrictive security measures that have been imposed by the Israelis on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, we declare those actions to constitute a violation of international norms and standards. It goes without saying that there will be further violence in the future as long as the Palestinian cause remains without a solution, given that the occupation continues. If the Council does not end Israeli practices, then it is as if we are encouraging Israel to continue its practices and aggression.

The State of Kuwait roundly condemns Israel's violations of international agreements as an occupying Power in Jerusalem. Furthermore, my country categorically rejects any policies or plans on the part of Israel that aim to Judaize the holy city, including isolating the city's environment and manipulating the city's demographics. Those are violations of international peace and security. That is why we call on the international Community to take on its responsibilities and face up to Israel's criminal actions in Jerusalem, particularly under the relevant Security Council resolutions, which reject any change in Jerusalem. Furthermore, we call on the international community to block any attempt by Israel at any time to change the historic status quo of the holy sites. It is necessary that we safeguard the religious status of those religious sites, which would allow worshipers to pray far free violence and provocations. Israel should remove the difficulties and obstacles.

All the measures taken by the occupying Power up to this point are not acceptable because they are insufficient. Israel needs to take additional measures. The practices of the occupying Power, Israel, on the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem, run counter to its legal commitments that have been established through international agreements and treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We should condemn those practices in the international community and through the Security Council. We should reject what Israel is doing in its closing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and putting obstacles in place that prevent the Palestinian people from exercising their religion.

The Security Council should protect the Palestinian people. Their fundamental rights have been violated by the occupying Power. Palestinians are suffering from religious terrorist attacks that are being carried out by the settlers and others. There are measures attempting to change the situation on the ground and impede the search for a two-State solution. I want to reiterate that peace should begin with the end of the occupation, which is entering its fiftieth year. The peace should be based on the legitimacy of international agreements and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted by all Arab countries in at the Beirut Summit in 2002. The Initiative calls for Israel's withdrawal from all of the Palestinian territories that have been occupied since 1967, which would guarantee the final status of Palestine and allow the Palestinian people to exercise their rights. It would allow for the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as the capital. We call on the international community to implement the relevant resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016) and those resolutions that condemn land-grabbing and settlements and call for an end to Israeli occupation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsigneur Kassas (*spoke in Arabic*): The Holy See commends the presidency of the People's Republic of China for bringing today's topic to the attention of the Security Council and the international community.

Notwithstanding the multiple challenges facing the Middle East today, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process cannot be allowed to slip out of the top priorities of the international community and the Security Council. The Holy See wishes to reiterate its firm support for the two-State solution, which would allow the State of Israel and a Palestinian State to exist side by side in peace within internationally recognized borders. If both Israel and Palestine are to enjoy security, prosperity and peaceful coexistence, there is no alternative to a negotiated settlement leading to a mutually agreed solution directly negotiated between the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the firm and even-handed support of the international community.

For that process to take place and succeed, Israelis and Palestinians must agree on substantial steps to reduce tensions and de-escalate the violence on the ground. Both sides must refrain from actions, including

with regard to settlements, that contradict their stated commitment to a negotiated solution.

The two-State solution will also require all the Palestinian factions to show united political will and work together to address the needs of their people. A united Palestinian front would prove the commitment of the Palestinians to a peacefully negotiated settlement and would be key to the economic prosperity, social cohesion and political stability of a Palestinian State.

The Holy See deeply regrets the loss of life and property in many parts of the Middle East caused by wars and conflicts, particularly in Syria, Yemen and in the northern region of Iraq, where the tragic humanitarian situation calls for renewed commitment by everyone to arrive at a political solution to those conflicts. Pope Francis deeply appreciates the tireless efforts of those who are working to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. He encourages all actors to work towards a Syrian-led political process leading to a peaceful and inclusive transition, based on the principles of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

Christian communities have existed for more than 2,000 years in the region, and they have peacefully coexisted with other communities. In that context, the Holy See urges the international community, through the Security Council, not to forget those communities. The Holy See believes that the rule of law, including respect for religious freedom and equality before the law, based on the principle of citizenship and regardless of one's race, ethnic origin or religion, is fundamental for the achievement and maintenance of peaceful and fruitful coexistence among individuals, communities and nations.

We must not forget Jerusalem, a city sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The historical status quo of the holy sites is a matter of profound sensitivities. The Holy See confirms its position in line with the international community and renews its support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the city of Jerusalem. In that regard, the Holy See reiterates the importance of an internationally guaranteed special status in order to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of all its inhabitants, as well as secure, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

Only last Sunday, during the Angelus prayer in Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis, who is deeply concerned about the situation in Jerusalem, made a strong appeal for moderation and dialogue, praying that all may be inspired by the resolve to work for reconciliation and peace.

We appeal to the Council to act urgently on its obligations in order to restore hope in the possibility of peace and to make that peace a reality.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to you, Mr. President, and the Chinese delegation for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestininian question.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

This year marks 50 years of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The vast majority of Palestine's population have lived their entire lifetimes under Israeli occupation. In the past 50 years, civilians have been denied their dignity and fundamental rights to free movement, education, health care and even the right to life. With each passing day, the number of Palestinians in need of humanitarian assistance increases. The situation in Gaza is even more dire. The conclusion in the report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development that the area could be uninhabitable in less than five years if current economic trends were to continue is becoming all the more real.

The Security Council has been seized of the matter of the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine and Israel, for over 70 years. The people of Palestine continue to look to the United Nations, notably the Security Council, to help them realize their right to self-determination. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become entrenched over the decades. It is long overdue for the Council to assume its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, and to work to reverse the negative trends that threaten peace and the two-State solution. The Security Council must renew its commitment to keep to its mandate and contribute to resolving the conflict.

It has become clear that the conflict between Israel and Palestine feeds into the wider regional dynamics by having a negative effect on peace, economic development, socio-political progress and security throughout the entire region. The Middle East peace process therefore remains one of the central issues shaping international relations within the region and in the world.

South Africa calls for the effective and immediate implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which reaffirms that Israeli illegal settlements have no legal validity, that they constitute a flagrant violation under international law and that they are a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. We call on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities, as demanded by the resolution, and remind Israel that no changes to the 1967 lines will be recognized, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the two sides through negotiations.

My delegation is intensely aware that the opportunities for a two-State solution are being eroded The ongoing Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories is a fundamental obstacle to a return to negotiations and a grave threat to the very existence of a future Palestinian State, as well as to a safe and secure Israel. Every settlement takes land away from Palestinians, who need homes, farmland and other infrastructure.

South Africa has a long-standing record of solidarity with the Palestinian people and supports the Palestinian cause. We firmly believe that the only just solution to the Palestinian question is an independent, sovereign, viable and united Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, functioning within recognized and secure borders and living side by side in peace with Israel and its other neighbours, as endorsed in the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

South Africa is concerned about the arrest and subsequent imprisonment, without charge or trial, of Palestinian Legislative Council member Ms. Khalida Jarrar, who was arrested in Ramallah on 2 July by the occupying Israeli military, and calls for her immediate release. Israel is a signatory of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates the right to a fair trail and the right of an accused to defend himself or herself. We call on Israel to abide by, and respect the provisions of, the Convention as an occupying force.

South Africa is also deeply concerned about the escalating tensions and violent clashes taking place in and around the Old City of Jerusalem. Given the particular sensitivities surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and the need to ensure security, the Quartet have called on all parties to demonstrate maximum restraint, refrain from provocative actions and work towards de-escalating the situation.

We strongly believe that the situation on the ground cannot be allowed to continue unchanged, as it remains an impediment to the security, peace, stability and development of the broader Middle East region. South Africa believes that ending the occupation is in the interests of both Israel and Palestine, and we call on both parties to take concrete steps to that end. The recent past has seen no movement on the peace process. The international community must recommit itself to restart the stalled peace process on the basis of international legality and accountability.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to begin by congratulating China, a country with which we enjoy friendly relations, on its presidency. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his efforts in connection with the mandate entrusted to him.

The crisis in the Middle East has been ongoing for 70 years. There is no fair or lasting solution on horizon, and the peace process is at a standstill. The people in our region aspire more than ever to peace and stability. At the same time, they are faced with a new cycle of escalations in violence. The international community should work as quickly as possible to put an end to the violence and to restore hope and faith in the peace process to the people in the region. The entire world must work to bring about peace by countering authoritarianism and extremism.

While the Security Council continues its efforts to address the complicated issues in the Middle East, we must also reinvigorate the peace process. All the parties should demonstrate restraint and respect for

international law in order to create the necessary conditions for a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution.

We recently witnessed the closure of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which was declared a military zone. The faithful faced numerous obstacles, and that impedes peace and stability and prevents a solution to the Palestinian question. Any attempt to undermine the status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif must stop. The State of Qatar has explained its grave concerns to Israel with regard to the closure, for the first time since 1967, of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The international community should also shoulder its responsibilities in the face of all of these violations. They are a provocation for the millions of Muslims around the world and only serve the cause of terrorism and fundamentalism around the world.

The escalation in violence must stop. We face an explosive situation. We need to work very seriously to achieve a peaceful solution to the Middle East problem. That would have a positive impact not just for the security of the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also for establishing peace and prosperity in the region as a whole. That would also make it possible to better fight terrorism and extremism.

When we talk about the solution that we want, we mean, of course, the solution that we have all known of for a long time, that is, the two-State solution: a Palestinian State and an Israeli State living side by side in peace, in respect of the right of Palestine to create an independent State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in strict respect of Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The State of Qatar has spared no effort to find a fair and lasting solution. We have made significant efforts in political and humanitarian terms to create the necessary and useful conditions that would allow for progress in the peace process. Within that framework, we have supported inter-Palestinian dialogue. In addition, we have worked in coordination with the United Nations because we know that this can have a very positive impact for the achievement of peace.

The suffering of the Syrian people continues. The Syrian people are paying a high price for the situation in the country. We have not been able to achieve peace thus far, and the Security Council resolutions on Syria have not yet been implemented. The State of Qatar will continue its efforts with various stakeholders and its international partners. Let us use all of the necessary resources to provide all of the aid that we can to the brotherly Syrian people.

The State of Qatar is facing unilateral measures from certain parties in the region. We will continue our efforts in strict compliance with the principles of good-neighbourliness, and we will do everything within our power to strengthen peace and stability in the region and around the world. We are working within the United Nations and also bilaterally to fight terrorism.

We are pleased to see that the Emir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, continues his mediation efforts to provide his support in the ongoing crisis. We remain hopeful that all of the crises in our region will be resolved in the framework of international law.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Security Council this month, and to thank you for your presence throughout this debate. It demonstrates your own interest, as well as that of your country, in the subject under discussion.

In recent weeks, tensions in the holy city of Jerusalem, caused by the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the imposition by Israel, following an incident, of restrictions on the faithful, was another demonstration of how easily the situation can escalate and approach the point of no return.

The Committee aligns itself with other statements made today reiterating the call to respect the sanctity of these sites and the right to worship there. The Committee regrets all loss of human life. In its joint communiqué with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation of 21 July, the Committee called on the international community to urgently reaffirm respect for the historic status quo and to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to rescind all measures that violate this status quo, including the installation of metal detectors, and to fulfil its obligations under international law. The restoration of the status quo at religious sites must be accompanied by urgent efforts to end the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The question of Palestine continues to be the topic on the United Nations agenda that goes back the furthest in time, and the Israeli occupation is the longest lasting occupation in contemporary history. As the Committee has repeatedly pointed out, this is an unacceptable and unsustainable situation that must end immediately.

Faced with the five decades of continuous occupation, and in order to consider concrete ways to end it, the Committee has been holding events throughout 2017. Last month, on 29 and 30 June, we organized here at Headquarters the United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation, which was opened by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina Mohammed, who delivered a message from the Secretary-General. The Forum was attended by experts, politicians, civil society representatives from Israel, Palestine and other countries, as well as by a Nobel Prize winner. The Forum served as a platform, without a doubt, for deliberations that were perhaps more ground-breaking, balanced and far-reaching than any that have taken place in a long time under the auspices of the United Nations on the question of Palestine.

While the views expressed were diverse, there was a clear consensus among the participants: the occupation is illegal, must end and must end now. I urge the Council to study the report of that Forum, which will be published in early August. It contains thought-provoking observations and recommendations, including on the need for the international community to redouble its efforts to achieve a viable and just solution, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as on the need for States to distinguish, in their relations, between the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. In addition, with regard to the situation in Gaza, the participants called for a shift from a humanitarian focus to a political and human rights focus that takes into account the legal obligations of all parties.

The Committee has continued to fulfil other aspects of its mandate in support of Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, including promoting capacity-building for Palestinian civil servants. For example, the Committee organized a capacity-building workshop in Beirut in April on the theme "Goal 17 for Palestine: South-South and Triangular Partnerships for Sustainable Development". The workshop promoted a common understanding of the practice of South-South and triangular cooperation as an important modality for the achievement of sustainable development objectives in Palestine and provided participants with practical tools to understand the inherent challenges and opportunities.

Last week, on 20 and 21 July, in Baku, the Committee organized an international conference on the question of Jerusalem, with the support of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The conference provided an opportunity to discuss ways in which the international community could raise economic, practical and concrete support for the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem. The issue of current tensions was also discussed at the conference.

The Committee has repeatedly stressed the illegality of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which is now in its tenth year. That blockade amounts to collective punishment and has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises, exemplified by the current electricity outages, the shortage of doctors and medicine, water and all of the consequences thereof.

Moreover, the Committee has repeatedly spoken out about the illegality of Israel's settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which remain a major obstacle to achieving peace and a serious violation of international law. Paragraph 2 of resolution 2334 (2016) expressly calls on Israel to

> "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem".

Regrettably, the recent announcement by the Israeli Government concerning an additional 4,000 dwellings reveals a total lack of respect for the Council's demands and a total lack of accountability or progress in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The momentum generated by the resolution must not be squandered, and the Council must fully utilize its accountability mechanisms to ensure the full implementation of its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which in paragraph 12

> "[r]equests the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months on the implementation of the provisions of the... resolution".

While the two informative briefings to date have highlighted what has been common knowledge for many years — namely, Israel's ongoing flagrant violations of international law — by way of oral statements, the Committee calls on the Secretary-General to issue written reports in the future and provide practical recommendations to ensure Israel's accountability.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): To begin with I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on China's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month, which has been distinguished, as is customary, by outstanding wisdom and responsibility.

We are a main stakeholder of the agenda item under consideration, as Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967. I therefore speak as a principal party in restating the position of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is a principled position in favour of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; an independent State across the whole of its national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the guaranteed return of refugees to their country under the relevant Security Council resolutions. Those non-negotiable rights cannot be subject to concessions or statutes of limitation, or impeded by force.

The holy esplanade of Jerusalem is under occupation and exploited by the Israeli occupying forces. Given the onoing situation around the holy sites, the Security Council must more than ever do more than merely express it condemnation and concern. The Council must fully assume its responsibility to ensure the immediate implementation of all of its resolutions relevant to ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, including resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegitimacy of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

With respect to Mr. Mladenov's briefing to the Council today, in our view nothing justifies the fact that he insisted on ignoring the nature of his mission and mandate as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. In an unacceptable, unprofessional and immoral manner, Mr. Mladenov failed to mention the illegal Israeli activities in the Syrian Golan. He did not underscore the United Nations position on the Israeli occupation since 5 June 1967, despite a dozen resolutions adopted by our international Organization, in particular the Security Council, on that very subject.

As a result of the racist and terrible Israeli occupation that has endured for more than half a century, the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan remain subject to the worst crimes under the oppressive policies of racial discrimination, detention, torture and other procedures. They are deprived of their natural resources. They are deprived of their right to study under the Syrian national curriculum. They are deprived of their right to a Syrian identity card. They are deprived of their right to access national Syrian hospitals in their villages in the occupied Syrian Golan. That situation, including the occupation and confiscation of land and property, has persisted for more than half a century.

The Special Coordinator ignored the fact that Israel is supporting armed terrorist groups in the occupied Syrian Golan. He did not address that issue at all. In addition, in a highly partial and unprofessional manner, Mr. Mladenov decided, as we heard this morning, to justify the attacks of the Israeli occupying forces on the Syrian army. I would remind Mr. Mladenov that we are talking here about Syrian territory occupied by Israel. The Israeli army provides logistical support to the terrorist groups in those territories. Whenever we gain a victory, we are attacked by the terrorist groups. The Israeli air force has targeted Syrian bases that are situated far from the occupied Syrian Golan.

Will Mr. Mladenov continue to justify Israel's actions and the fact that Israel is targeting Syrian army bases, which are themselves combatting terrorism? Mr. Mladenov should indicate his concern about the fact that the United Nations is refusing to assume its responsibilities. He should discuss the statement made at the conference between the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America. For the record and for history, I call on the Special Representative to consider the well-documented reports of Ms. Dilyana Gaytandjieva, a Bulgarian national, and the articles published in a Bulgarian newspaper on the activities of terrorist groups in Syria and the transfer of weapons from Bulgaria to Jeddah, including on ships registered to certain Member States. All of this is being financed by certain Gulf States. I will return to that issue in detail when we discuss counter-terrorism in another meeting.

It also would seem that the Special Coordinator has not heard of the illegal decision of the Israeli occupying forces to hold local council elections in villages in the occupied Syrian Golan. They called this an Israeli law, but in fact it is a flagrant violation of our Charter and

of United Nations resolutions as well as international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981), adopted unanimously on 17 December 1981. That resolution rejects Israel's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan and finds all Israeli activity in the occupied Syrian Golan null and void from the perspective of international law.

My country, the Syrian Arab Republic, categorically rejects this new Israeli resolution. We reiterate that the Golan will remain an integral part of Syrian territory and that it will be reintegrated with the motherland. We also reiterate that we have sovereign authority over the occupied Syrian Golan within the 4 June 1967 borders. This is a non-negotiable right on which there can be no concessions. These are our territories; they are occupied now, but we will get them back. The Israeli settlers will leave, sooner or later.

In that respect, my Government calls on the Security Council to bring pressure to bear on Israel to ensure the immediate liberation of Syrian prisoners, in particular Sedqi al-Maqt, the Nelson Mandela of Syria, who served a 27-year sentence in the occupying Power's prisons. He was sentenced a few days ago to another 14 years because he had dared to expose the occupying Power's practice of providing logistical support to armed terrorist groups in southern Syria and in the separation zone.

My country, Syria, believes that today the Security Council must shoulder its historical responsibility to correct this injustice. We are meeting today and have met on other occasions with the goal of putting an end to the loathsome Israeli occupation, not of holding discussions on issues far removed from the item on our agenda.

I would recall that Israel has long occupied territory and carried out massacres. It is the only party in the Middle East to have an arsenal of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Do not forget the terrorist war and the unprecedented destruction it has wrought in the Middle East. Indeed, certain parties in the Security Council are trying to avoid working to end the appalling Israeli occupation and are providing cover for it.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castro Cordoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Sir, and the Mission of the People's Republic of China on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July.

Millions of human beings live daily in anguish, despair and pain as a result of armed conflict. Costa Rica deeply deplores the increase in conflicts in the Middle East. The situation has deteriorated in recent years, and it has not been possible to achieve peace and security in the region. It is urgent that we put an end to the humanitarian crisis we are facing and seek a political solution, as this crisis has become a humanitarian tragedy of shocking proportions and represents an affront to all of humankind. We therefore appeal once again to the Security Council to fully exercise its mandate to maintain international peace and security, as clearly set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

With respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Costa Rica reiterates the urgent need to resume negotiations between the parties on the central issues of the conflict, which remain to this day, on the basis of previous obligations undertaken and agreements reached. My country condemns the escalation of recent tensions and the clashes that have resulted in casualties in and around the holy city of Jerusalem, and urges the parties to show the utmost restraint and refrain from any unilateral action that could worsen the already volatile situation.

It is crucial that a political solution to this conflict be found it and that we create, as soon as possible, a new peace architecture that would make it possible to resolve differences and lead to the achievement of the objective agreed by the international community, that is, harmonious coexistence between an independent Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

June marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. That is 50 years of having failed, as an international community, to come together to find a solution to one of the most widely discussed conflicts since the establishment of the Organization. It is a failure of our multilateral system, in which international law must prevail as a central pillar. We cannot continue to overlook the pain of the millions of people who are victims of this political and military struggle. That is why I urge that we do our job and ensure that multilateralism prevails so as to promote solidarity and fulfil the commitment to achieve the

goals of the entire international community, not simply those of a group of nations. The United Nations must play its role as the epicentre of global governance on the basis of respect for the collective quest for solutions.

Costa Rica deems it urgent to find a political solution to this conflict. We must work on establishing a new peace architecture so that we can resolve differences and implement preventive diplomacy, with a view to holding negotiations leading to tangible, lasting and sustainable results. Military options are not solutions. War cannot be fought with more war. Peace is not built by fuelling conflicts with arms and bombings. Peace must be built using the tools provided us by diplomacy and multilateralism in order to put an end to this humanitarian tragedy.

We believe that we must without delay work to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the most serious crimes, with a view to putting an end to all actions leading to the deaths of innocents, delivering justice and preventing suffering and the deaths of even more innocent civilians. The only thing worse than this human tragedy is the fact that it results in impunity rather than justice.

Costa Rica reiterates its concern over the growing tensions in the conflict in the Middle East and strongly urges the international community to achieve peace in that region, and specifically all permanent members of the Council to commit, in accordance with the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group code of conduct, to not using the veto in case of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We urge the Council to act expeditiously and decisively to ensure the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Mayong Onon (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening and presiding over today's meeting. My delegation is grateful to the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his important briefing and reflections.

Malaysia associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysia deplores the violent clashes between the Israeli security forces and Palestinians on 21 July in the West Bank, which left three Palestinians dead and injured many others. Those clashes in the West Bank further complicate the already volatile situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call on all parties to refrain from actions that could further escalate tensions in Jerusalem's old city.

We condemn in the strongest terms the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on 14 July by the Israeli authorities. We join other member States in demanding that Israel refrain from any action that would alter the status of the Islamic holy site. We reiterate our call for Israel to provide unrestricted access for Muslim worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also urge Israel to cease any action that can have the effect of changing the status quo of the Islamic holy sites. The sanctity of the religious sites must be respected. In that regard, we also commend and support the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and custodian of the holy sites of Jerusalem to restore calm in the holy city.

We are extremely disheartened to learn of the plans announced by Israel to increase the development of housing units in East Jerusalem to a rate of over 30 per cent more than in 2016, as highlighted by Mr. Mladenov earlier today. That is a clear violation of resolution 2334 (2016). We recall the pronouncement by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, asking for the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) to be produced in writing. The report must outline where the parties were in compliance. In cases of non-compliance, concrete measures must be detailed to ensure the full and effective implementation and enforcement of the resolution.

We continue to look forward to seeing a written report on the implementation of the resolution. Let us make good on the historic Council action that reflected the urgency and conviction to reverse the negative trends that threaten the peace and viability of the two-State solution. We must now focus on the implementation of existing resolutions, including on settlements, as well as on all acts of violence against civilians and further incitements.

Being detached and apathetic to the developments in the occupied Palestinian territory is no longer an option. In that regard, Malaysia welcomes the positive initiative undertaken by the United States in facilitating a water-supply arrangement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government for Palestinians in the West

Bank and Gaza, the respected United Nations and Egyptian initiative to facilitate the provision of fuel for the supply of electricity and the concrete commitments made by Qatar on reconstruction in Gaza.

As we mark 50 years of the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, the international community owes it to the Palestinian people to mobilize its political will and explore other peaceful, legal and diplomatic avenues available to us to end the longest-running occupation in modern history. Let us not be condemned by history by virtue of being a by-stander.

Finally, Malaysia remains committed to playing a constructive role to realize the two-State solution. We reiterate our long-standing support for the inalienable rights of self-determination for the Palestinian people and a just, comprehensive and final solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening today's open debate.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements to be made by the representatives of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative for his comprehensive oral report, pursuant to resolution 2234 (2016), and would like to join other delegations in underlining the need for a written report.

We express our deep concern about the escalation of tension surrounding the illegal closing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem and impeded access to the mosque by Muslim worshippers. We share the views of the Special Representative that the situation surrounding the mosque can have potential catastrophic costs well beyond the walls of the old city, and stress the need for respecting and maintaining the historic status quo at the holy sites, with the freedom to worship guaranteed for all concerned.

In this fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, the Security Council must demonstrate its resolve to address the Palestinian question as a matter of urgency. The continued breaches of international humanitarian law and systematic human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of any effective international accountability, the occupying Power continues killing Palestinian citizens, including youth and children, imprisoning and abusing scores of Palestinians in its detention centres and dispossessing and displacing thousands of Palestinian families through its construction and expansion of illegal settlements.

We share concerns about the recent Israeli decision to construct 1,800 illegal settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem, which would lead to the further eviction of Palestinian civilians, in flagrant violation of resolution 2234 (2016). It is obvious that the settlements, as well as the wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem, are being deliberately pursued in order to fundamentally change the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Council has a moral obligation to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlement regime in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip and put an end to all forms of occupation. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people suffering for decades from Israel's policy of collective punishment. The hunger strike recently observed by thousands of prisoners in Israeli detention centres underscores the need for the international community's sustained efforts to address their grievances and plight.

Under the guidance of our honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, the Government and people of Bangladesh remain steadfast in our support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-State solution.

We continue to urge all key actors to remain seized of their efforts to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions, and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the principle of land for peace. We also add our voice to the need to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order for it to effectively carry out its humanitarian mandate in support of the Palestinian refugees.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank you for having convened today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I would like to commend your friendly country on its call to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and empower them to enjoy their rights and establish the sovereign State of Palestine based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. I also thank you for the support that you personally represent in that regard.

The past few days have seen the opening of a new chapter of violence in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia firmly condemns all the illegal steps taken by the Israeli occupying authorities in Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Jerusalem endured for more than 1,000 years under Arab Muslim rule, during which the sanctuaries of Judaism, Christianity and Islam were respected and protected, as were the worshippers in holy areas. During the half-century of the Israeli occupation, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was deliberately set on fire in 1969, and worshippers in the Abrahamic sanctuary were massacred by the terrorist settler Baruch Goldstein, who was glorified by the people and Government of Israel after his death.

The terrorist settlers have not stopped plotting, devising provocations and calling publicly for the demolition of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the exclusion and expulsion of Muslims from Jerusalem, in coordination and cooperation with the Israeli occupation authorities. Today we continue to watch in pain as the Israeli occupying authorities have besieged Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, prevented worshippers from performing their religious rites and reacted with barbarity to peaceful protests. One such scene has been documented, in which we saw an Israeli soldier on our television screens kicking a Muslim worshipper as he prayed. Has anyone here seen a worse demonstration of disregard and contempt for a religion and the practice of its rites? An act of such shamelessness is an expression of the doctrine of the Israeli occupation, its oppression of the unarmed Palestinian people and its deliberate policy of insulting, humiliating and terrorizing them.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia firmly condemns all terrorist acts, regardless of the identities of the perpetrators or their victims. We condemn all States, organizations and individuals who practice, ignore or help to finance or incite terrorism. We believe there can be no justification or excuse for terrorist acts.

It is disturbing that the Security Council has not taken measures to express anger at the acts of the Israeli occupying Power, and we urge it to uphold its responsibilities and to put a stop to Israel's continued anti-Palestinian practices. We reiterate our firm position of support to the Palestinian people and rejection of any attempts to impose control and unilateral measures designed to show contempt for Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We also want to warn the world about the danger of the situation's exacerbation and escalation, which would have an impact on the entire region and beyond. My delegation has warned the Council several times that the most dangerous aspects of the conflict in Palestine are Israel's provocations and plans aimed at changing Jerusalem's historical status, Judaizing the city, altering its demographics, distorting its Arab Muslim identity and disrespecting all its holy Muslim and Christian sites. Saudi Arabia rejects any attempt to harm Jerusalem's status and calls on all States to commit to the relevant international resolutions in that regard.

My delegation affirms that the only path to peace is through a return to the Arab Peace Initiative and to the development of an effective mechanism guaranteeing the Palestinian people's enjoyment of their inalienable rights. The occupation must be ended in accordance with a specific timeline, establishing an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital within the June 1967 borders; ensuring Israel's withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farms; ending the construction of illegal settlements on Palestinian lands and removing existing ones; and reversing all the unilateral measures that have been undertaken by the occupying Power in Jerusalem.

With regard to Syria, Saudi Arabia welcomes the agreement reached between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the United States of America and the Russian Federation on a ceasefire in south-western Syria. We hope that no-fly zones will be established in Syria

in order to guarantee civilians' safety and protection from the barbarities of the Syrian regime and its allies, particularly in view of the fact that we continue to witness the Syrian regime violating every truce agreement and massacring, murdering, terrorizing and displacing its people with the assistance of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and terrorist sectarian militias led by Hizbullah.

We should emphasize that a lack of accountability is one of the most important reasons behind the continuing criminal acts of the Syrian authorities and their allies. We therefore reiterate that the international community should continue to take a firm stand against all acts of killing, siege, deliberate starvation, displacement and ethnic cleansing, which have provided a golden opportunity for Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and others to expand in the absence of an authority. Saudi Arabia once again affirms its willingness to participate in any joint international effort to eradicate such terrorist organizations, wherever they may be found.

We believe that the Syrian people's struggle and aspirations for freedom and dignity are destined to be victorious, even if that may be somewhere down the road. Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin, and the security and stability of our region and indeed the entire world require that they go hand in hand. We therefore call for the immediate and essential implementation of the first Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), including the formation of a transitional authority with the executive power to establish a future Syria big enough for all its citizens, a Syria that denounces terrorism and violence and stands above discrimination and extremism.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Sir, allow me to congratulate you for your leadership of the Security Council during the month of July. We express our appreciation for the holding of this open debate.

We support the statement made by the delegation of Nicaragua on behalf of Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people and the statement to be made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba expresses its deep concern about the situation in the Middle East, which is plagued by violence, interference in its internal affairs, foreign aggression and long-term conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is time to settle the historic debt owed to the State of Palestine and restore the inalienable rights of its people, which have been violated by Israel during half a century of occupation, repression, collective punishment, destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, forced displacement and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are compelled to recall what our Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, Leader of the Cuban Revolution, said on 12 October 1979 here at the United Nations:

> "Pushed off their land, expelled from their own country, scattered throughout the world, persecuted and murdered, the heroic Palestinians are a vivid example of sacrifice and patriotism, living symbols of the most terrible crime of our era." (*A/34/PV.31, para. 24*)

The Security Council must take concrete steps to end that historic injustice by urgently ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories dating back to 1967. The approximately decade-long blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has led to a profound socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis affecting 2 million Palestinian civilians, must be halted immediately, and obligations under international humanitarian law must be fulfilled.

A two-State solution and a comprehensive, just, peaceful and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question will not be possible as long as Israel continues to violate its obligations under international law and the Charter of the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Cuba also demands the end of the occupation of the Syrian Golan. We reiterate that any steps or actions taken, or to be taken, so as to change the legal, physical and demographic status and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in that territory, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 497

(1981) and the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as an act of defiance of the international community.

Cuba takes note of the initiatives to resume direct peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis and the recently concluded agreement with regard to supplying water to Palestinian territories. Cuba will continue to defend the right of the Palestinians to self-determination; a free, independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, within the pre-1967 borders; and the return of Palestinian refugees. We will also continue to support the entry of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. We hope that, in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation and the tenth anniversary of the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Security Council will live up to its responsibility and fulfil its debt to the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in my capacity as Chair of the OIC group.

This meeting is taking place in a climate overburdened by an increasingly unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East, with the unresolved and festering question of Palestine remaining at the heart of unrest in the region. The OIC is very concerned about the contempt shown by Israel, the occupying Power, towards the Security Council's authoritative decisions and demands, in contravention of international law and in total obstruction of a political horizon for a peaceful solution. In this fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967, the urgency for a peaceful solution remains as pressing as ever and requires serious and immediate efforts.

The OIC expresses its serious concern with regard to the ongoing developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and condemns all of the illegal policies and measures being implemented by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at altering the status, character and demography of the territory, including the Arab, Islamic and Palestinian character and identity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The OIC condemns Israel's illegal action of closing the Mosque and further impeding the access of Muslim worshippers to the Mosque. The OIC urges the Council to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to ensure the freedom of worship for Palestinians, including in occupied East Jerusalem; refrain from interfering in the affairs of the Islamic and Christian holy sites; respect the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif; and act in compliance with its obligations under international law as the occupying Power. In that regard, the OIC reiterates its firm commitment to the rights of the Palestinian people in occupied East Jerusalem, which forms an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

At the same time, the OIC reiterates its condemnation of the continuation and escalation of Israel's illegal measures and policies aimed at expanding its illegal colonial settlements and further entrenching its five-decades-long colonization of Palestinian land. The OIC condemns in particular the recent Israeli decision to build more than 1,800 illegal settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem, which will in effect lead to the confiscation of Palestinian land and the forced eviction and dispossession of more Palestinian civilians. In that connection, the OIC reaffirms that the continuation of the Israeli settlement policy will undermine the territorial integrity, viability and contiguity of a future Palestinian State, notwithstanding the fact that settlement activities are illegal acts constituting flagrant violations of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including,in particular resolution 2334 (2016), which unequivocally demands an end to all such activities.

The Council must act to uphold its responsibilities to end Israeli settlement activities, which have been manifestly and deliberately stepped up in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem. While the OIC welcomes the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), as orally delivered to the Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (see S/PV.7977), we call once again for the submission of a meaningful written report so as to ensure the proper documentation of the implementation of the resolution's provisions, given Israel's continued flagrant disrespect of the Council and its resolutions. We further appeal to the international community for its sustained engagement, as also called for by resolution 2334 (2016), and its full support at this critical period for sponsorship to a timed, multilateral political process that would lead to the enforcement of the relevant United Nations resolutions aimed at finally ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land since

1967, achieving the internationally recognized two-State solution and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — the objectives to which the OIC remains unflinchingly committed.

The OIC further reminds the Council of its duties with regard to Israel's condemnable systematic violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including deliberately killing and injuring civilians and peaceful protesters; violent military attacks against the civilian population; the detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians; the confiscation of land and property; the demolition of Palestinian homes; and the forced displacement of Palestinians; as well as terrorism perpetrated by settlers against Palestinian civilians. All such actions continue to raise tensions and sensitivities and are severely aggravating the fragile situation on the ground, with the potential to spark grave consequences. The Security Council must demand that all such illegal acts cease and that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and all the relevant United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine.

The OIC group remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role in that regard. It should act to ensure that the Palestinian people realize their right to self-determination, sovereignty and independence in their State of Palestine in the territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that a just solution emerges for the plight of Palestinian refugees, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law.

I must also reiterate the concerns of the OIC regarding the grave humanitarian suffering that the Palestinian people is enduring throughout occupied Palestine. The situation in the Gaza Strip remains particularly grave and alarming, as the Palestinian civilian population there continues to suffer from decades of occupation and the impact of military aggression, compounded by the inhumane, illegal Israeli blockade, now in its tenth year. We reiterate the call for an end to this massive form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people and for urgent efforts to reconstruct, rehabilitate and revive Gaza, which also remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

Today we must also reiterate the call for attention to the plight of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in Israeli detention centres. We call for respect of their rights, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and international human rights law, and for an end to their abuse and captivity by the occupying Power. The hunger strike recently undertaken by thousands of prisoners is a cry for attention to their critical plight and for action to resolve it. In that regard, we appeal for international compassion and responsibility.

Lastly, the OIC encourages all States Members of the United Nations to intensify their ongoing efforts aimed at overcoming the continuing financial shortfalls of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with a view to ensuring adequate, sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for the Agency for the duration of its mandate, pending a solution. In that way, it can fully meet the needs of the Palestine refugees at this critical time and continue to carry out its indispensable humanitarian mission and its stabilizing role amid the heightened needs and volatility in the region.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the conflicts in the Middle East — including the tragedy of the Palestine question and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the occupation now in its fiftieth year — and what seems to be chronic divisions within the Security Council have allowed such menaces as violent extremism and terrorism to flourish in the region and reach the proportions we must confront today as we collectively grapple with the elusive search for viable solutions. Therefore, the multifaceted dimension and root causes of the region's conflicts must be addressed, without exception, in the context of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, and with adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the guarantor of peace and security in the Middle East and globally.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on China's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also thank you, Sir, for taking the initiative in organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing this morning.

Events in the region and internationally have an impact on the Palestinian question. While the peace process has been paralysed in political terms since 2014, Israel has continued to take unilateral measures in expanding its settlements in an unprecedented fashion on the Palestinian territory that has been occupied since June 1967. Unprecedented violence in the region is dashing Palestinian hope. They have the feeling that the international community has abandoned them to turn to other issues. It is certainly true that other questions are no less important, but they should not lead us to forget the Palestinian question. It remains the main crisis in the Middle East.

In political terms, the years we are living through are very difficult ones when compared to previous years. We see that the occupation has continued for 50 years in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while settlements, colonialization and Judaization continue. Those policies cannot lead to peace. That is why the international community should assume its responsibilities and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table to kick-start the peace process on the basis of the two-State solution, a solution that is currently under threat more than ever before. The current situation will lead only to violence and chaos.

We appreciate and are optimistic about the determination of the new American Administration to encourage dialogue between the parties to achieve the two-State solution. Were the situation to remain bleak, it would go against the interests of the parties. I repeat that that will only fan the flames and cause the violence to increase. In that regard, my country supports all attempts to restart the peace process on the basis of a precise time frame decided upon by the parties, as well as on the basis of the two-State solution within the borders of 4 June 1067, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

There can be no doubt that Jerusalem has a very special place not only in the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also for worshippers of the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions. That is why coexistence needs to be maintained in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that Muslims turn to before Mecca, and it is the third holy city, after Mecca and Medina, for more than 1.5 billion Muslims. That is why any attempt to alter the legal status of Jerusalem will lead only to an increase in violence and hatred. That would encourage a number of young people to turn to terrorism. The King of Morocco Chairs the Al-Quds Committee at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and, in that regard, we call for the rights of the Palestinian people to be respected, in particular their right to create a State with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only way that we can achieve a fair and sustainable peace in the Middle East, and that would allow us to strengthen international peace and security.

His Majesty King Mohamed VI has on a number of occasions, including at multilateral and bilateral meetings, called for an end to settlements, as does resolution 2334 (2016). His Majesty has also warned against the Judaization of Jerusalem and any attempt to change the legal status of the city. He said the same in a statement to the press, and the Security Council itself also raised the issue in a statement issued on 17 September 2015 (SC/12052). His Majesty the King of Morocco has called for every step to be taken to allow the Palestinian people to create a State with East Jerusalem as its capital within the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace with Israel. Morocco's position on the Arab Peace Initiative therefore remains unchanged, which we support. We also call for the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders. Morocco stands ready to participate actively in all initiatives that allow for progress on the peace process and the achievement of peace, security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, we are pleased to see you presiding over the Security Council during the month of July. We congratulate you, Sir, and your country's delegation on the manner in which you have been guiding the business of the Council this month, and in particular for convening this open debate on such an important issue for international peace and stability.

It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at today's quarterly open debate on a subject to which we have historically attached particular importance, namely, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". First of all, we would like to convey our appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator of the

United Nations for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing this morning.

During the seventeenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in September 2016 in Margarita Island, Venezuela, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their continued solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as their unbreakable support for their just cause, all while calling on the member States of the Movement to renew their commitment and to strengthen and further coordinate their efforts to promote the realization of justice and the rights of the Palestinian people in the light of the critical situation that continues to prevail and the ever-diminishing prospects for a peaceful solution.

That was also the case almost a month ago when, on 27 May, the Ministerial Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement on Palestine issued a political declaration of support and solidarity with the Palestinian people to solemnly commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and other Arab countries in 1967. The declaration also sought to reflect upon other upcoming solemn anniversaries, including the seventieth anniversary of the General Assembly's decision to split Mandated Palestine by adopting resolution 181 (II) in 1947, as well as the seventieth anniversary of the Al-Nakba, which the heroic Palestinian people have resisted.

In that regard, we emphasize that a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects remains a priority on the agenda of the Movement. In addition, we reaffirm that the ongoing Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security that requires attention and an urgent solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations itself. In that regard, the Movement stands ready to contribute to the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution. We call for increased international and regional efforts to support that goal, all while recalling the responsibilities of the Security Council and the General Assembly on the matter, including responsibilities that were recently reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), which was welcomed and endorsed by the Movement in its communiqué dated 27 December 2016. We believe that the resolution offers the most viable path to peace and establishes the requisites and parameters for a just solution that would safeguard the two-State solution, based on pre-1967 borders. We believe it would create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, fairly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security a reality.

The member States of the Movement reiterate their calls for full respect and implementation of the resolution. We stress that that remains essential in order to remedy the situation on the ground, remove tensions and foster an appropriate environment for the search for peace. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's second report on the implementation of that resolution, which was orally presented to the Security Council by Mr. Mladenov (see S/PV.7977). However, we reiterate the need for a substantive written report to be submitted in order to support the Council's functions and ensure adequate documentation of the implementation of the provisions of the resolution, especially in the light of continued disregard on the part of Israel concerning the Security Council and its violations of the Council's resolutions.

The Movement expresses its deep concern about recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in particular with respect to the continuation and escalation of illegal policies and measures by Israel, the occupying Power, which are aimed at expanding its illegal settlement campaign, continuing the consolidation of its occupation and half-century invasion of Palestinian lands and continuing with its violation of the rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, it is worth mentioning the most recent issuing by the Israeli occupying authorities of permits for the construction of more than 1,800 units of illegal settlements in East Jerusalem, as well as the fact that those policies continue irrespective of the fact that they will result in the eviction and expropriation of more Palestinian property, including the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

Instead of ending its violations, reversing their negative tendencies on the ground and demonstrating its commitment to the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, as required by the Security Council and the international community, Israel continues to act in contempt of the Council and in violation of its legal obligations.

In that regard, the Movement's member States strongly condemn the recent provocative decisions by Israel, the occupying Power, to carry out its settlement activities, which are in grave violation

of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We are also alarmed and deeply deplore the blatant contempt of Israel, the occupying Power, for the unequivocal decision of the Security Council in that respect, which clearly reaffirmed that Israeli settlement activities are not legally valid and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. The Movement calls on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, and to fully respect all of its legal obligations, including those stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Movement also recalls the call of the Security Council to end all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as acts of provocation, incitement and destruction.

With regard to Gaza, the situation remains of great concern to the Movement, particularly with respect to the deteriorating humanitarian situation, which will by untenable by 2020, according to United Nations officials in the field. In fact, according to the latest report by the United Nations country team, most projections for 2020 have deteriorated further and faster than expected. In that sense, the continued obstruction of the reconstruction of homes, property and civil infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli aggression of 2014, as well as the extremely slow pace of Gaza's recovery due to Israel's current illegal blockade, have forced thousands of families to remain displaced and homeless. That has also prevented the reconstruction of critical infrastructure, including that related to the electricity supply, which has resulted in serious repercussions on humanitarian, socioeconomic, psychological and environmental conditions. In that regard, we reiterate our call for a complete lifting of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has lasted for more than 10 years. We simultaneously emphasize that the Gaza crisis must be tackled in a comprehensive manner, in accordance with international law, including the relevant international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions. That all should be taken in the context of the general situation and the continuation of the illegitimate and belligerent Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the unequivocal calls to put an end to the half-century occupation.

In addition, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its strongest condemnation of Israel's systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including, inter alia, the wilful killing and injury of civilians, including peaceful protesters; violent military raids, including, in particular, in refugee camps; the terrorizing of the civilian population; the imprisonment and detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children and women; the confiscation of land and property and the demolition of Palestinian homes; the forced displacement of Palestinians, particularly Bedouin communities; and settler terrorism and violence against Palestinian civilians. We remind the Council of its duties in this regard.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its calls for strengthened international efforts to achieve without delay an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution, and reiterates its readiness to cooperate and support all relevant efforts, in line with the decisions taken during the seventeenth Summit on the Island of Margarita, which declared 2017 as the International Year to End the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. In this regard, and on the basis of the Movement's quest to establish a peaceful and prosperous world and its role as an anti-war and pacifist force, we offer the good offices of the Non-Aligned Movement as a platform for global peace and in particular for respect for the right to life and the inalienable right of peoples to their self-determination and independence.

The States members of the Movement also condemn in the strongest possible terms the acts of aggression committed by Israel against the Syrian Arab Republic on 17 March and considers such acts to constitute a grave violation of Syrian sovereignty and a breach of international law, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974. In this regard, we request the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by clearly condemning those acts of aggression and taking the necessary measures to prevent their recurrence, and holding Israel accountable for threatening regional and international peace and security.

The States members of the Movement reiterate their condemnation of all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status and character of the occupied Syrian Golan. In this regard and in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel to abide by resolution 497 (1981) and fully withdraw

from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to encourage States Members of the Organization to redouble their current efforts to overcome the ongoing shortcomings of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to ensure adequate, predictable and sustained funding of the Agency throughout its mandate so that it can fully meet the needs of Palestinian refugees and therefore fulfil its humanitarian mission.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate in order for us to share views on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

My delegation wishes to align itself with the statement delivered by delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the outset, let me take this opportunity to express our deep concern at the escalating tension and violent clashes that took place in and around the old city of Jerusalem this weekend. We join others in strongly condemning these acts of terror on innocent people and regret the loss of innocent lives and hope for a speedy recovery to those who are wounded.As the tension in occupied East Jerusalem continues to escalate and the people of Palestine continue living in the face of an unrelenting human tragedy of multiple conflicts and rising tension 50 years on, my Government wishes to reiterate the urgent need for the international community to swiftly address this rapidly deteriorating situation.

We regret that over the half century since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, there has been little progress achieved to bring about a viable solution to the Palestinian quest for control of the occupied territories. It is sad that the lack of progress in the dialogue between the parties, continued illegal settlement activities, violence and increased radicalization still engulf the Middle East to this day. In this regard, Botswana condemns the ongoing violence and continued documented settlement-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, which regrettably undermine all international efforts towards the achievement of a lasting solution.

We believe that previous actions of the Council since 1967, including the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), resolution 338 (1973) and most recently resolution 2334 (2016) are positive steps in the right direction on the path towards delegitimizing the Israeli settlements and reiterating the call for the achievement of a two-State solution. In our view, this is the only viable solution to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We therefore call for the immediate and complete halt of any settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which are in violation of these resolutions and also a breach of international law.

If achieving a negotiated two-State outcome is indeed the only way to lay the foundation for an enduring peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all stakeholders must take responsibility to ensure that this cause is achieved. In this respect, we welcome continued efforts of the United Nations, the United States, Russia, the European Union and regional partners who continue to work tirelessly for progress in the quest for solutions in the peace process in the Middle East so as to achieve a peaceful, fair, negotiated and lasting solution in line with international law.

Botswana's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process remains unequivocal. We support a negotiated solution that embraces the coexistence of Israel and Palestine as sovereign States, living side by side, that share not only a border, but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity. We continue to call on both parties to resume dialogue as soon as possible without preconditions as an essential step towards achieving peace and a two-State solution.

In conclusion, Botswana reiterates that a stable and peaceful Middle East, free of violence with the two States living side by side in harmony, is not only good for peace and security in the region, which has enormous potential, but will also provide a conducive environment for a prosperous and peaceful Middle East. It is therefore pertinent for all of us to create the conditions for a return to negotiations to solve all final status issues on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, mutual agreements and international law.

My delegation wishes to reaffirm our Government's solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterates our resolve to find a lasting solution that will shape the

Middle East landscape in order to improve the quality of life of the innocent people in that country.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bande (Nigeria): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate, which provides an opportunity to reflect on the fast-developing events in Jerusalem. We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his very lucid briefing and commend him for his efforts in the search for peace in the Middle East.

I wish to align myself with the statements made by the representative of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and of Uzbekistan, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The surge in violence and senseless killings in Jerusalem perpetrated by extremists on both sides, so well articulated by speakers before me, is deeply troubling. Indeed, fears have been expressed that if the situation is not contained, it could escalate further, with its attendant unsavoury consequences. The international community must work in a concerted manner to avert such an occurrence. At this crucial moment, we find it crucially important for Security Council member States to use their influence with both sides in order to encourage them to de-escalate tensions. It is imperative to maintain the age-long status quo by ensuring the safety and security of both worshippers and visitors to the holy sites in Jerusalem. In that regard, we welcome the assurances of Prime Minister Netanyahu that Israel has no interest in changing the status quo.

It must be stated that recent developments must not obscure the underlying problem in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As widely acknowledged, the inherent difficulty is the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. We would like to see a genuine effort on the part of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to return to negotiations. The current situation does not offer a sustainable solution to the question of Palestine. Indeed, it is creating despair among the people of Palestine and causing anxiety among the people of Israel.

It is evident that a departure from the current crisis and a revival of the peace process is hardly achievable without ending or reversing the policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that there are a number of specific actions that are necessary to foster mutual respect and compromise, build confidence, and pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution. In that regard, we encourage Israel to take concrete steps to freeze and reverse all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by making enhanced efforts for unity and dealing with militancy and other internal security challenges.

Beyond a doubt, neither military might nor militancy will resolve the protracted conflict. The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is neither ideal nor sustainable. Both sides must take concrete steps to return to negotiations on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant agreements between them. Nigeria supports the efforts of the international community towards establishing an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the long-standing conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hannigan (Iceland): I would like to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this meeting. I thank you, Ambassador Liu, for your personal presence here during the whole meeting.

I would also like to express our thanks to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his frank and informative assessment.

Iceland, like others, has been deeply concerned by rising tensions related to events around Al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, where violence has escalated in recent days. We are encouraged by the decision of the Israeli Government to remove metal detectors from the Al-Aqsa area, hopefully defusing the situation.

Political leaders on both sides carry a heavy responsibility to continue to reduce tensions, with the assistance of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Religious leaders also have a significant role to play. Confidence must be restored among Palestinians that Israel is not attempting to alter the status quo, and the Palestinian leadership must condemn all terrorist acts and do its utmost to prevent violence.

Looking at the bigger picture, continued violent acts committed by individual Palestinians against Israeli citizens must cease, and Israeli settlements must come to an end if the two-State solution is to remain viable.

The aim of resolution 2334 (2016), which implemented several conclusions of the 2016 Quartet report, was indeed to protect the two-State solution from further erosion, particularly by Israeli settlements policy. The regular reporting to the Security Council under the resolution is an important injection of accountability. A negotiated two-State solution is the only viable peace plan that will provide a just and lasting peace and allow both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this important open debate, allowing us to share our views on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his informative briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Last month marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands. It is painful that we still have to witness unprecedented, grave crises in the Middle East, with the unsolved question of Palestine at the heart. After a half century, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains complex with the peace process stalled and a lack of dialogue between the parties. The situation has become ever-more complicated and inflamed by continued illegal settlement activities, acts of terror, the rise of violent extremism and increased radicalization. These ongoing activities have caused the vast loss of lives, disruption of culture and livelihoods of civilians, constitute an obstacle to the peace process, including a two-State solution, and pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security.

Together with the international community, Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the serious developments in the region, especially the recent escalating tensions and violent clashes in and around the old city of Jerusalem. We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism and violence and extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families of the victims, and wish a speedy recovery for the wounded. We are also very much concerned about the closure of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

It is clear that half a century of occupation is a tragedy for all sides. It is illegal under international law and makes achieving peace impossible. We call on Israel to cease any further settlement activities, as well as its closure of the Gaza Strip, respect and restore the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, and at the same time, step up efforts to improve the living condition of the Palestinian people. We urge all parties concerned to fully freeze actions of hostility, incitement and violence, and allow the rapid and safe access of the United Nations and other humanitarian aid agencies to help ease the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

It is essential for all parties to exercise self-restraint; strictly comply with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law; implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and take concrete actions to reduce tensions and resume peace talks without any further delay.

Viet Nam reaffirms our unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their fundamental rights, especially the sacred right of self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We consistently advocate the settlement of disputes through constructive dialogue and negotiations, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map for peace in the Middle East, with a view to ultimately achieving a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

In that regard, we welcome the continued efforts of the League of Arab States to relaunch serious peace negotiations based on a two-State solution, establishing a Palestinian State on the lines of 4 June 1967. We are also of the view that more integrated support from the international community is needed to facilitate Palestinian economic development and job creation and to enhance the State of Palestine's institutional capacity.

Today's open debate represents an important fresh appeal for action to push forward the peace process in the region. We must make use of every window of opportunity to strive for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East through negotiations,

under strong United Nations leadership and with the good will of all Member States and the proactive contributions of relevant regional organizations and other stakeholders.

Let me conclude by reiterating Viet Nam's readiness to continue to work with the international community for such meaningful collective endeavours.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Sir, for having convened this debate, which is very important in the current circumstances.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the Israeli measures that have prevented Muslim worshippers from accessing Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which runs counter to freedom of worship and is an unacceptable provocation to all Muslims around the world. It is part and parcel of a number of attempts by Israel to impede the status quo in Jerusalem and in Al-Aqsa Mosque.

We express our gravest concerns about the violence we have seen on the holy esplanade. We insist that the Mosque must to remain open to all worshippers. We call upon all parties to demonstrate restraint and to abide by international treaties, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. The international community should assume its responsibilities to end all violations and any step to alter the historic and legal status of Jerusalem. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore calls once again on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume their responsibilities, to end those dangerous practices and to ensure respect for the relevant conventions and laws, international law as a whole and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council concerning the city of Jerusalem by providing the necessary protection to the Palestinian people and to the holy sites in order to protect freedom of religion.

A fair and sustainable peace in the region will depend to a great extent on the ability of the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, including their right to an independent State within the borders of 4 June 1967, and on an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and to all forms of settlement.

Finally, Bahrain recalls that the Palestinian question remains among our major concerns. We therefore encourage any attempt to help the international community to find a fair and sustainable solution to that question on the basis of the two-State solution, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative, and to provide the region with a genuine opportunity to live in peace, security and development.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Bessedik (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Algeria I would like to thank you, Sir, for having organized this open debate on the Middle East and the very dangerous developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the issue.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Algeria condemns the violations and dangerous attacks that continue to be carried out by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian worshippers around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and elsewhere in the West Bank. We also condemn the unfair blockade of the West Bank, which continutes despite the many international calls to end the occupation, including resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The violations and violence are very dangerous. They includes murder, the arrest of Palestinian worshippers around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and others. Those measures deprive Palestinians of the freedom of religion. We also see attempts to displace citizens and the destruction of houses. We condemn such horrible crimes in the strongest terms. Furthermore, the practices of the occupying forces constitute a flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, without accountability and in total impunity. That is why the international community must act to end those heinous crimes.

My delegation expresses its full solidarity with the people and authorities of the Palestinian State, a brother country. We have always supported the Palestinian people and their just cause to recover their full rights, including full and entire recognition of the Palestinian people under international law, on the territories that have been occupied since 1967, and we call for the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In the face of this dangerous spike in violence and systematic efforts to Judaize the Islamic holy sites, we call on the international community to accelerate

its joint efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people are not left without defence and can protect the holy sites. The criminal acts are increasing by the day, and we therefore call on the Council to fully assume its responsibilities and to ensure that all of its resolutions on the subject are fully applied.

In conclusion, we restate that the capacity of the international community to establish international peace and security is at stake here. We need to show solidarity, and Algeria participates generously in that solidarity, by seeking to establish a sustainable solution that reflects its commitment to the three pillars of the United Nations, namely, peace and security, development and human rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I congratulate China on acceding to the presidency of the Council and appreciate its presiding over the quarterly open debate on the Middle East. I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning.

The United Arab Emirates associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today's debate could not be more urgent or timely, as we are witnessing a dangerous deterioration of the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Arab Emirates is particularly alarmed by Israel's continued aggression towards the holy sites in Jerusalem and the measures that it has taken to change the status quo in the city. We strongly condemn the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque. The United Arab Emirates calls for the removal of all obstructions to access for worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and full respect for the historical and legal status of Jerusalem.

The international community must engage to de-escalate the tensions in Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as urge Israel, the occupying Power, to honour its legal and international commitments and end its unilateral actions. To that end, the United Arab Emirates expresses its support for the tireless efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the custodian of the Muslim holy sites in East Jerusalem, to ease tensions and maintain the status quo on the ground.

Israel's illegal settlement activities and other provocative measures continue to pose major obstacles to achieving a two-State solution that grants the Palestinian people their inalienable rights. The plight of the Palestinian people has endured for nearly seven decades, and it must end. We call on the international community and the Security Council to take all measures necessary to reach a two-State solution that establishes an independent Palestinian State based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, according to the Arab Peace Initiative, the relevant resolutions and the Madrid Principles.

The paramount aim for the United Arab Emirates is the promotion of security and stability in our region. The continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the lack of a just settlement to the Palestinian issue have critically destabilized the Middle East. The situation in the occupied territories paves the way for extremist groups to spread their messages of terrorism and violent extremism and prey upon populations with their destructive agenda throughout the region.

In conclusion, we call on the Security Council and the community of nations to hold States accountable for spreading conflict and regional insecurity by supporting and financing terrorism and, in turn, violating international law and this body's resolutions. The United Arab Emirates believes that international law and the institutions that uphold its pillars are the key to lasting stability, and we appeal to Member States to comply with the decisions of the Security Council, in accordance with Article 25 of the United Nations Charter.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Qassem Agha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will not take up so much of your time, Mr. President.

As is his custom, the representative of the Saudi-Wahhabi-expiatory regime that sponsors terrorism worldwide has made a statement that is replete with falsehoods and distorts the truth in a desperate attempt to serve the interests of Israel, by deviating from the core of this agenda item, namely, ending the Israeli occupation of Arab lands; to mislead the international community as to the truth of what is taking place in

my country, Syria, regarding the achievements of the Syrian army and its allies in facing the war of terrorism that has been imposed on us for six years; and to cover up what the Bani Saud regime is doing by becoming allies with Israel and certain sheikhdoms and kingdoms of the Gulf region, as well as Governments of that region and others, in supporting and financing armed groups.

The representative of the Saudi regime pretended to have forgotten to mention that the terrorism prevailing throughout the world is nothing but the result of the adoption by the ruling regime in the Bani Saud kingdom of an extremist religious doctrine and its promotion worldwide by supporting religious centres on which it spends billions of dollars annually to spread Wahhabism, a doctrine based on the rejection of others, charging them with infidelity and condoning their killing.

Since the onset of the terrorism war imposed on my country, Syria, we have warned against the fact that the terrorism affecting our country originates in certain States of the Gulf area, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Today, after more than six years of our analysis, some are now saying that Qatar is a sponsor of terrorism. I, in turn, say to the representative of the Saudi regime that the day will inevitably come when his country will be described as a key State sponsor of terrorism, and the victims of terrorism in Syria and the world will confront him and everyone who has supported terrorism in Syria and the world and will hold them accountable, wherever they are.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): It was unfortunate to hear today certain States making statements that are completely detached from reality. Instead of calming tensions, some abuse this platform to fuel the flames by making inflammatory and false accusations.

Let me be clear. Israel is committed to upholding the status quo concerning the Temple Mount. Israel safeguards the freedom of religion and the right to worship of Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as members of all other religions, at the historical sites.

Allow me to refer to some of the false accusations that were made here today by certain Member States.

I was surprised to hear the representative of Lebanon refer to her country as a beacon of democracy and a champion of human rights. To the representative of a Government in which a designated terrorist organization, Hizbullah, holds several positions and is considered a legitimate political party, I would suggest a reality check. This is the same Hizbullah that has been known to commit unspeakable atrocities in Syria and is notorious for its destabilizing terrorist activities throughout the Middle East. As for Lebanon taking the floor to speak about human rights, I would suggest reading the latest report on torture in Lebanon by Lebanese authorities of Syrian nationals in Lebanese custody.

The Iranian representative must have no shame to be able to sit here today and speak in this Chamber as his country continues to promote terrorism and destabilize the Middle East. This is the representative of a regime that is arming terrorist organizations across the region and bolstering the murderous Al-Assad regime in Syria. Iran does all this in violation of numerous Security Council resolutions.

Iran is continuing to develop an offensive ballistic-missile programme in direct violation of resolution 2231 (2015), and, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on that resolution (S/2017/515), Iran continues to export illicit weapons to various terrorist groups and conflict zones.

Iran even went as far as to launch a ballistic missile at a very specific and intentional target, the Star of David. This is a direct and unacceptable threat by one Member State against another.

When it comes to the credibility of the Syrian representative who spoke here earlier today, I am certain that I do not need to remind any representative now sitting in this Chamber that this is the same representative who keeps on saying and continues to claim that his Government is not using chemical weapons against its own people, this despite all the concrete evidence to the contrary.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): When I hear the Syrian representative speak, I feel like laughing. He described us as the sons of Saud; we are very proud to be sons of Saud, from the Saud dynasty. He accused us of promoting Islam, which we certainly do, but we do not use chemical weapons to

kill our own children and citizens, as does the Syrian regime. We do not terrorize our own people, as does the Syrian regime.

Whenever I hear such accusations from the Syrian representative, I feel like telling them that he is really talking about himself, not us. What they are doing is trying to meddle in Gulf country affairs and the crises in that area. They want to take advantage of that situation, but they should not interfere in these things. If it were us, we would be ashamed. We would at least try to avoid disgracing our own Government and killing our children.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8012

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8012th meeting
Wednesday, 26 July 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Ilnichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-23082 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2017/12.

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8013

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8013th meeting
Wednesday, 26 July 2017, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Burundi to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Michel Kafando, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, and His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations, in his capacity as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kafando.

Mr. Kafando: I would like to start by congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

It is an honour for me to address the Security Council in my capacity as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the first time. As members are aware, the facilitator of the East African Community, former President Benjamin Mkapa, was scheduled to brief the Council with me. Because of a health-related issue, he could not be here today. I wish him a speedy recovery.

My briefing will focus on three aspects: first, my meetings in Bujumbura; secondly, my preliminary assessment of the situation in Burundi; and thirdly, a possible way forward.

(*spoke in French*)

When I arrived in Bujumbura on 27 June, I was received in turn by the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation, Mr Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, and by the President, Pierre Nkurunziza. I spent approximately an hour talking alone with President Nkurunziza. My meeting with the President was essentially a courtesy visit. In Bujumbura I also met with various Burundian political stakeholders — representatives of civil society and religious groups and members of the diplomatic corps, as well as of the United Nations family.

In Tanzania, I was received by former the President and facilitator of the inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, East Africa, Regional and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Mahiga. The facilitator said that he had concluded his work for which the report had been sent to President Museveni, the chief mediator of the inter-Burundi dialogue.

In Addis Ababa, I also conducted talks on the sidelines of the African Union Summit with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda and African leaders — namely, the current Chairperson of the African Union, Mr. Alpha Condé, as well as with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki — who are closely following the situation in Burundi.

I have just briefly listed the contacts with whom I met within the framework of my first trip to Burundi and the subregion. I imagine that members are now wondering what assessment I took away from those various meetings and exchanges. Based on those meetings, there appear to be divergent assessments of the political situation that prevails in the country. The Burundian authorities are confident in their ability to conduct the country's affairs in serenity. They consider that the general situation is calm, while condemning foreign interference in the management of their internal affairs and recalling their commitment to maintaining their national sovereignty.

The representatives of the political opposition and some civil society members are concerned about what they deem to be abuse of power by the current Government. They are calling, therefore, for greater involvement by the region and the international community to promote an inclusive dialogue, without preconditions, in which all Burundians take part. They are calling for the suspension of the constitutional review process under way and for an end to violations of their basic rights and the hostility of the authorities towards those rights, which often go hand in hand, they claim, with suppression by the forces maintaining order and by Government-affiliated groups. However, political parties and civil society organizations that

support the Government have a completely different point of view.

The economic situation continues to worsen because of the tense political environment, which in turn deters private national and international investors. There is unemployment, in particular among young people. That situation causes people to leave for neighbouring countries, thereby increasing the number of refugees.

The security situation has improved since the beginning of the year. In Bujumbura, all appears calm and people freely go about their work. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there have been grenade attacks over the past few weeks that have left many people dead and injured. The reasons for those attacks have not yet been made clear.

People want an atmosphere of peace in Burundi, but under what conditions and at what price might that be achieved? The first requirement must be to give priority to inclusive dialogue, a sine qua non for any settlement of the crisis. It is imperative for the Burundian Government to acquiesce to the insistent demands of the countries of the subregion and of the African Union — which are supported in this by the United Nations — to move to an inclusive dialogue that would include members of the opposition in exile and those in the country. I believe that that is the price to be paid if we are to restore trust among Burundians, to ensure credible, stable and democratic institutions and to promote genuine national reconciliation. From that perspective, the Arusha Agreement must remain the reference standard, the cornerstone. All non-governmental stakeholders with whom I have met have acknowledged that, have demanded that.

The new prospects and guidelines that we must develop to resolve the situation in Burundi must converge, it seems to me, toward joint, collective action by African leaders, first by those in the subregion, in solidarity with the United Nations. Such joint collective action must be aimed at convincing the Burundian regime to accept appeasement measures, in particular those put forward by the Facilitator and the more general measures featured in the Arusha Agreement.

Joint action must also be geared towards encouraging the Burundian regime to participate in the inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue. The recent visit paid by President Nkurunziza to President Magufuli of Tanzania is an encouraging sign in that regard. Let us hope that that gesture indicates a willingness to move the inclusive dialogue process forward. It is for that reason that, in my capacity as Special Envoy, and now that many high-ranking African officials have decided to personally and fully take part in the resolving the crisis, I suggest that more discernment be brought to the analysis of the Burundi question.

As you know, Mr. President, I am on my first fact-finding mission, and I intend to continue consultations in the coming days. I truly believe in the subregion's commitment to working for peace in Burundi, with the support of the African Union. I strongly recommend that the United Nations firmly support those efforts. Even if a bit more patience is required, we will certainly reach a dynamic compromise. I repeat that all of our efforts must demonstrate unwavering support for the region and in particular the efforts of the Mediator and Facilitator and those of the Government of Tanzania.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Kafando for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lauber.

Mr. Lauber: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the latest activities of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). As usual, the following statement was submitted to and approved by the members of the configuration, including the country concerned, Burundi.

From 10 to 13 July, I undertook my fifth visit to Burundi as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, concentrating this time on socioeconomic cooperation. The main objectives of my visit were, first, to pursue the dialogue on the socioeconomic situation and international cooperation with the Government and its partners in Burundi; secondly, to insist on the relevance of the dialogue process led by the East African Community (EAC) and to refer to the large support it enjoys among the States Members of the United Nations; and thirdly, to have a first-hand impression of the developments in the country.

I would like to start my briefing with a word of thanks to the Government of Burundi for its hospitality and confidence and to Ambassador Albert Shingiro, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, for his support in organizing the visit. During my visit of 10 to 13 July, I was received by the President of the Republic

of Burundi, the Minister for External Relations, the Minister of Finance and the Secretary General of the ruling party, the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie. I also held numerous meetings with Burundi's international partners, namely, with representatives of the member States of the Configuration. Furthermore, I met His Excellency Mr. Michel Kafando, the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. François Fall, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Central Africa; His Excellency Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the Special Envoy of the African Union; and representatives of the private sector and the United Nations country team. On 12 July, I participated in a retreat, which was organized by the Minister for External Relations and dedicated to the socioeconomic situation in Burundi.

All in all, the city of Bujumbura made a lively impression when I was there, and the security situation seemed calm. However, during my stay, some cases of violence were reported. I also continued to hear reports about the prevalence of a climate of fear and repression. The importance of the EAC-led dialogue and interaction among political parties was highlighted by many interlocutors, including the Secretary General of the ruling party. Most interlocutors also welcomed the dialogue initiative with Burundi's political parties, which had been launched earlier this year by Burundi's ombudsman. Many interlocutors characterized the economic situation as deteriorating and gave examples on how that development affects them personally.

Burundi's international partners described the broad range of their engagement with Burundi, which reaches from humanitarian assistance to structural support for the health service and investments in the energy sector. At the same time, they are confronted with certain obstacles to their cooperation, such as accessibility to foreign currency, the lack of reliable data and the restrictive law on non-governmental organizations and others.

A key event during my visit was the socioeconomic retreat I mentioned, which took place on 12 July. That retreat was the latest stage in the ongoing socioeconomic dialogue that the PBC Burundi Configuration had launched in November 2016 near Geneva, in cooperation with the then Resident Coordinator, with consultations among Burundi's main multilateral partners: the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank. In March 2017, I had participated in a meeting between the Government and United Nations agencies in Bujumbura, which focused on the socioeconomic challenges in the areas of agriculture and food security, health and education. In the context of that March meeting, the Government had expressed its wish to organize a retreat with partners in Bujumbura on the challenges in the same three sectors in summer 2017.

Besides the Chair of the PBC Burundi configuration, the Foreign Minister had invited Mr. Garry Conille, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burundi, representatives of several United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the African Development Bank in Burundi to the retreat on 12 July. Government participation also included the Minister for Agriculture; representatives of the Second Vice-Presidency; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Public Health; the Ministry of Finance; and the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management. The main objective of the retreat was to specify the main socioeconomic challenges in the three priority areas of agriculture, education, and health and to discuss possible responses.

In his opening remarks, the Foreign Minister suggested that we focus on the most urgent needs of the population and emphasized the readiness of the Government to engage in a dialogue with its partners. In my statement, I situated the socioeconomic dialogue in the broader peacebuilding engagement of the PBC, and underlined that sustainable peace is not possible if we do not advance simultaneously within all three pillars of United Nations engagement: peace and security, socioeconomic development, and human rights.

Macroeconomic analysis was not the main focus of the event, but the indicators cited during the retreat showed that the situation remains concerning. For instance, the Central Bank of the Republic of Burundi rated headline inflation at 21.1 per cent for March, driven mainly by a rise in food prices of 34 per cent.

Allow me to provide a few examples of the socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges and of the recommendations that were reflected in a joint summary at the end of the retreat.

In the agricultural sector, the participants identified low productivity, the impact of climate change, insufficient infrastructure for stockpiling and transportation for agricultural products, the lack of

mechanization in the sector, the lack of fertilizers, and plant diseases among the main challenges. In response, the participants recommended measures such as the agro-industrial transformation of agricultural products, additional investments and addressing the problem of land scarcity.

The continuing malaria epidemic was a priority subject among health experts. Other challenges include the high mortality of mothers and small children, HIV/AIDS, demographic growth and malnutrition. The participants concluded that additional qualified staff and financial resources, better access to health data and a range of other measures could help to meet the current challenges.

The educational sector is facing challenges such as insufficient school infrastructure and a lack of school material and teachers, and 46 per cent of school-age children are currently not attending school. According to the participants, additional resources would be needed to train teachers, improve infrastructure, build additional school canteens, produce textbooks and strengthen the peacebuilding perspectives in school education.

With regard to the macroeconomic sector, one of the recommendations of the joint conclusions states:

> "In order for the country to gradually achieve a balanced payment, assistance to the budget is needed, for which the Government and its development partners are invited to enter into a dialogue."

Apart from such specific elements, the participants also formulated some general recommendations, such as the need to obtain more reliable socioeconomic and macroeconomic data, to align Burundi's socioeconomic priorities with the Sustainable Development Goals, and to involve Burundi's international partners in the current elaboration of the National Development Plan. One of the recommendations, which the Government and the participating partners noted in their joint summary and which is of particular relevance for the Configuration, states that the socioeconomic dialogue should continue and involve additional partners who were not invited to attend the retreat of 12 July.

On 13 July, the President of the Republic received me in Gitega, the second largest city of the country. He reiterated his appreciation for the efforts of the PBC Burundi Configuration. I thanked him for the cooperation between his Government and the PBC, and informed him about my current engagement and the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat of the previous day. I mentioned that the regional engagement in follow-up to the East African Community (EAC) summit of 20 May and the report by President Mkapa had received very positive feedback from the members of the Configuration, adding that the broadly shared expectation among Member States is that the Government of Burundi fully engages in this process.

The President outlined Burundi's national development efforts, with a particular focus on education, health, agriculture and energy supply, mentioning both the progress achieved and challenges remaining. He made clear that Burundi continues to need international partners and expressed gratitude for the current assistance. He also mentioned the demographic challenges that the country is facing and thanked the United Nations Population Fund in particular for its support in this area.

Furthermore, the meeting with the President was an opportunity for me to raise the questions of national reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the outstanding memorandums of understanding with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Union in relation to the deployment and engagement of human rights and military observers in Burundi.

Based on my latest observations and conversations in Burundi, I have drawn the following conclusions regarding peacebuilding in Burundi.

First, the international community should continue to follow developments in Burundi carefully and take all aspects of the current situation into account.

Secondly, the mediation efforts that President Museveni and President Mkapa are undertaking on behalf of the EAC deserve our full political and technical support. The socioeconomic conversation must complement those efforts and the work by the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Michel Kafando.

Thirdly, a frank and open discussion between the Government and its international partners on socioeconomic cooperation and a conducive environment for effective assistance is necessary in order to improve the economic situation and is thus an essential element of peacebuilding in Burundi. I

therefore intend to pursue the socioeconomic dialogue between the Government of Burundi and its partners.

Fourthly, it is important to pay increased attention to the question of national reconciliation and dealing with the past. I would suggest that the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund support efforts in this area.

Fifthly, I would like to underline the importance of creating a good environment for the organization of peaceful and democratic elections in 2020, including through the full and equal participation of women.

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking the Security Council for its continued interest and support for the engagement of the PBC in Burundi.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Lauber for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi, Mr. Michel Kafando, and the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Jürg Lauber, for their briefings.

Uruguay notes that since the last briefing of the Council on Burundi (see S/PV.7978), held on 20 June, new events have taken place that in our opinion are positive steps towards a resolution of the crisis in Burundi. One of those steps was Special Envoy Kafando's visit to the country at the end of June, which we hope will help to restore the dynamic of the relationship between the Burundian Government and the United Nations.

Special Envoy Kafando has just given us details about his visit and the nature of the conversations that took place on 27 June. We reiterate our support for his work and hope that in carrying out his tasks, he will involve a broad range of partners, both from the Government and the opposition, as well as from civil society. Furthermore, we acknowledge the constant efforts carried out by the regional and subregional bodies to unblock the political process in Burundi.

In recent summits, both the African Union and the East African Community reaffirmed their full commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis and underscored that dialogue is the only road possible. We also have a road map that was presented by the facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, which contains a series of specific steps that would help to relaunch the political process and generate conditions for transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections in 2020. In that connection, Uruguay encourages countries in the region to support Burundi in a united and coordinated manner. We also urge all of the Burundian parties to commit to the proposed road map and to work on its implementation as soon as possible, as was mentioned by Ambassador Lauber.

We welcome the successful holding of the socioeconomic retreat on 12 July, which brought together national authorities and several international partners. It identified the main challenges that the country faces in socioeconomic matters and, on that basis, will aid in seeking solutions. Uruguay notes the important role played by the Peacebuilding Commission in those efforts and encourages the continuation over time of the dialogue platform that was created and the involvement of new interested partners.

Uruguay cannot help but reiterate its concern over the deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi. We strongly condemn each and every one of the abuses and violations in the area of human rights, no matter who committed them. That includes cases of extrajudicial executions, sexual violence in the context of the political crisis, arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced disappearances, and harassment and intimidation of civil society organizations and even journalists, as well as restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

Given the situation, we regret the fact that the Government of Burundi has not yet resumed its cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since it was suspended in October 2016. We call for the swift conclusion of a memorandum of understanding for the resumption of the Office's activities in Burundi. We also call for full cooperation between the Government to Burundi and the Commission of Investigation on the human rights situation established by the Human Rights Council. Full respect for the human rights of all Burundians is a necessary condition for the holding of an inclusive and credible political dialogue. It is also necessary for the creation of an environment conducive to organizing peaceful and democratic elections in 2020.

Mr. Bessho (Japan) I also thank Special Envoy Michel Kafando and Ambassador Jürg Lauber for their informative briefings.

I would like to focus on two main points regarding Burundi. The first concerns the need to re-establish trust between the Government of Burundi and the international community.

We welcome Special Envoy Kafando's engagement with Burundi and regional Governments. We call on the Government of Burundi to work constructively and cooperatively with the Special Envoy. We fully support the Special Envoy's efforts. We also thank Ambassador Lauber, Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his proactive role. It exemplifies how usefully the Peacebuilding Commission can support the work of the Council.

A year has passed since the adoption of resolution 2303 (2016), which remains unimplemented. The situation in Burundi remains fragile, and we are concerned by the worsening socioeconomic situation, as well as serious, ongoing human rights violations. In June, our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Burundi, told the Council that a resumed presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Burundi was a certainty. Yet, as I see it, there has been no progress on resumed cooperation between the Government of Burundi and UNHCHR. Despite repeated calls by the international community, only a limited number of human rights observers of the African Union (AU) have arrived in Burundi. While the Council has urged the Government of Burundi to cooperate fully with the deployment and activities of the United Nations police component, it has not yet been established. We call on the Government to Burundi to promptly address those concerns.

I believe that the maintenance of cooperative relations with the United Nations, the AU and other international partners is clearly in Burundi's own national interest. A neutral international presence in Burundi would have a very positive effect in building confidence between Burundi and the international community. The Council must act to ensure that presence.

My second point concerns regional efforts on Burundi. We thank President Museveni and President Mkapa for their mediation efforts. Progress on an inclusive national dialogue in advance of the 2020 elections is vital for peace and security in not only Burundi, but also in the wider region as a whole. We call on the Government of Burundi to seriously commit to an inclusive national dialogue without conditions. We also call on the Heads of State in the East African Community (EAC) to further enhance their engagement in the situation in Burundi. In response to the call by our colleague, Ambassador Lauber, I am confident that the Council will continue to support the EAC-mediated dialogue process moving forward.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank our briefers, Special Envoy Kafando and Ambassador Lauber, for their insights and efforts made so far to continue negotiations between the Government of Burundi and all stakeholders in the country.

We welcome the recent appointment of Mr Kafando and believe that he will do everything in his power to ease the situation in the country. As we can see from his briefing, during his short but very productive visit, Mr. Kafando was able to establish good working relations with the Government of Burundi and other actors in the country, as well as with regional organizations.

Kazakhstan supports the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue and the work of the Tripartite Joint Commission. We are concerned by slow progress in the political negotiations. We reiterate our call to all parties in the country to actively participate in the dialogue with no preconditions. That process must be supported and reinforced by the regional organizations, including the African Union (AU) and its mission in Burundi, which monitors the overall situation.

We also support the active engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission as a great platform for dialogue between Burundi and all international partners. We welcome the outcome of the socioeconomic retreat, which was recently held in Bujumbura. We urge the Burundian Government to sign the relevant memorandum of understanding with the African Union for the deployment of the rest of the 200 AU military and human rights observers. We also commend the European Union for supporting the deployment of 48 AU observers.

The full implementation of the provisions of the Arusha Agreement is vital to prevent a further escalation of violence and maintain peace and security in the country. It is our hope that all parties in the country

will start to implement the Arusha Agreement. Another round of negotiations will facilitate that process.

Another problem that concerns us is the worsening humanitarian situation, which is affecting the entire Great Lakes region. Its causes are not just political; there are other reasons, such as a poor macroeconomic situation and drought. In that connection we call upon the international community to continue supporting all of the regional States that are hosting Burundian refugees. Humanitarian actors must further scale up their response in order to meet the needs of nearly 3 million people in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to express our firm belief that the political sovereignty and integrity of Burundi must be preserved in strict compliance with the principles of international law. Also, it is critically important that the Government of Burundi maintains a political dialogue with the United Nations and its agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and all other members of the international community.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia welcomes the briefings provided by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Michel Kafando, and the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Jürg Lauber, Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Bolivia commends the mediation carried out by the former President of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, and the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Museveni, with respect to the Arusha Accords and the Burundian Constitution. Bolivia once again encourages all parties to support that mediation process and to work together to achieve a negotiated political settlement.

We agree with the past statements of Mr. Mkapa to the effect that, if the peace process is to be successful, all parties must work on confidence-building measures and constructive dialogue in good faith. In that respect, we encourage and acknowledge the efforts of the joint working group, the East African Community and the team from the Office of the Special Envoy, and the work of the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. Similarly, we encourage the parties to implement the road map proposed by Mr. Mkapa, based on the spirit of peace of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.

We welcome the positive outcome of the recent meeting in Bujumbura convened by the Special Envoy and the authorities of Burundi, including President Pierre Nkurunziza, in which they agreed to continue the inter-Burundian dialogue in an inclusive environment. We also welcome the decision by the African Union at its twenty-ninth summit, held 27 June to 4 July in Addis Ababa, to reaffirm its commitment to a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Burundi through a swift resumption of the inter-Burundian dialogue under the stewardship of the East African Community, with the support of the African Union.

Likewise, we take note of the retreat on 12 July, in which the Government met with various international partners to assess the current challenges facing the country in the macroeconomic sphere, in agriculture, health, education, risk prevention and disaster management, with a view to working on the country's socioeconomic recovery. We commend the work of the Government of Burundi and the country's Ombudsman for their awareness-raising efforts to facilitate refugees returning to their country, and we encourage them to pursue that objective.

Bolivia urges that actions in the negotiating process in future continue to be carried out in a progressive manner and in coordination with the country's authorities, including, inter alia, coordination of the presence of the observers and the United Nations police component in accordance with resolution 2303 (2016), if future security conditions so require. We reiterate that coordination must be carried out in respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Burundi, observing the obligation of States to provide security and protection for their citizens.

Given the complexity of the process, it is our firm belief that it is vital to continue solidifying the foundations to ensure definitive stability in Burundi, through initiatives that may be needed and with the full and committed support of the international community, based on the framework of law, justice, reconciliation and peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Shingiro (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I am speaking under your presidency, Sir, I wish to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for the invaluable support that your country, the

People's Republic of China, continues to provide to African countries in general and to my country, Burundi, in particular, especially in terms of respect for the sacred principles and values of our common Organization. We are very grateful for that.

Allow me also to thank the other members of the Council for their ongoing support for Burundi's sovereignty and political independence since the outbreak of the insurrectional movement in 2015 and the attempted coup d'état on 13 May 2015.

My thanks also go to Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) — who, as he noted, has just returned from a field visit to Burundi from 10 to 13 July — for his ever-increasing role in mobilizing resources in support of Burundi's socioeconomic sector.

I hasten to welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Michel Kafando, who has just provided his first briefing to the Council since his appointment as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and his first visit to Burundi, from the end of June to the beginning of this month.

In my statement, I shall stress the political, security and human rights situation. I shall also say a word about freedom of expression, refugees and reconciliation, as well as the efforts of the Government of Burundi to rebuild the frayed confidence of some of its development partners.

With regard to the political situation, I am pleased to inform the Council that the inter-Burundian political dialogue process is ongoing, with some progress made. The dialogue has not stalled, as some people would have us believe; it is following an evolutionary path. The internal process, which was led by the Government-established National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue has ended and a final report has been sent to the national authorities. The recommendations of the report are the result of a dialogue involving more than 26,000 Burundians, and they will be combined with the conclusions of the dialogue process at the subregional level to eventually produce a solid road map for peaceful elections in 2020.

Meanwhile, another promising dynamic of internal dialogue among all stakeholders is ongoing under the facilitation of the Burundian Ombudsman. It is following a positive trajectory and has already organized several inclusive dialogue workshops with our partners in Bujumbura. All of those processes complement each other without competition, thereby strengthening the culture of dialogue in our country.

We remain convinced that by strengthening democracy in a country like ours, which is still working to build peace, justice and security, there is no solid pillar on which the rule of law can rely other than the holding of free, peaceful and transparent elections. Any alternative attempts to take power through unconstitutional shortcuts are unacceptable and will go nowhere.

The coups d'état that Burundians have experienced in the past represent the nightmare that they are trying to wake up from today. Since the democratic elections of 2005, that dark chapter of our history has closed, a hopeful one has opened and we are gradually building a culture of democracy, despite a number of new challenges that we still have to tackle. That is why our President has asked Burundi's political parties, which today number around 30, to regroup, conduct an in-depth review of their internal policies on unity and discipline and raise awareness among their militant adherents about the importance of remaining united and respecting democratic principles. He has advised them to totally reject divisiveness, refrain from any provocations or manoeuvres that could goad them into murdering one another on the pretext that they have different political or social affiliations and, as far as possible, avoid polluting Burundi's ever-changing political space.

In that regard, the President has asked civil-society groups to refrain from involvement in political affairs and from deeds or words that could sow division and dissension of any kind or become an incitement to killing such as we saw during the insurrection in 2015. Rather, he urged them to concern themselves with the welfare of the population, including by giving support to his efforts to restore society and community. He also appealed to religious leaders to continue with the mission that God has entrusted to them by preaching the gospel throughout the country and refraining from political acts that could turn them away from the path of righteousness, and encouraged them to continue to get involved in the country's development efforts and in the promotion of human rights and the values of ubuntu in Burundi.

With regard to constitutional matters, we should recall that this issue is exclusively in the domain of

national sovereignty and should be discussed only within a national framework. As the Council is aware, no one has the right to deprive the Burundian people of their sovereign right to define a political future that suits them and is tailored to their needs, and that applies to all the peoples we represent here.

Turning to the issue of security, we all know that it is central to every issue, since no development is possible without peace and security, and vice versa. Burundians are devoted to peace and equality and are absolutely determined in their commitment to safeguarding peace night and day. Our country is now calm, as all those who spoke here this morning have acknowledged. Peace and security re,_ ,, thanks to excellent cooperation between the forces of law and order, the Administration and the people. Where anything else is concerned, we all know that ordinary criminality is as old as humankind, and like everyone else, Burundi has to deal with it every day.

On the human rights front, it is generally agreed that no country in the world is so perfect in this area that it is in a position to lecture others about it. Just like other countries, and in what we should remind the Council is an especially difficult post-crisis environment, Burundi is continuing its efforts to promote human rights and ensure that they are protected. We firmly believe, and will continue to insist, that only international cooperation and a mutually beneficial partnership that respects the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations can make an effective contribution to the genuine protection of human rights in Burundi or anywhere else. Excessive or selective political pressure should give way to cooperation and dialogue. My country has promised to continue working to make progress and improve its cooperation with all good-faith actors in this area.

We cannot speak of the state of human rights without mentioning the prison situation. We have taken steps to reduce crowding in the prisons and, more recently, to promote national reconciliation. The President has ordered the release of more than 2,500 prisoners, in addition to the 3,416 released in 2015, the 6,136 in 2016 and, very recently, the 2,247 in 2017 from among the 2,500 who, as the Council is aware, received a presidential pardon at the end of 2016, a commendable measure that deserves the Council's support and to be recognized as a gesture of peace for Burundians.

With regard to the freedom of the press — and contrary to the pronouncements of various politicians and journalists who, as the Council is aware, describe Burundi as they wish it to be rather than as it is — the Government of Burundi has never shut down any private media outlets. Of the three or four private media outlets that were partially destroyed in the wake of the foiled coup d'état of 13 May 2015, two have already reopened and the others are functioning normally. Today more than 20 national and international private radio stations are broadcasting freely in Burundi, and we will continue working to improve things in an area that is so essential to the promotion of democracy in our country. We are trying as best we can to find a good balance between the protection of human rights and the consolidation of the rule of law. We are also pleased about the fact that no journalists are imprisoned in our country, contrary to what we see elsewhere.

With regard to refugees, our Head of State has asked the Burundi Ombudsman to continue with efforts to raise awareness among refugees and non-violent political actors about returning home in order to prepare for the 2020 election deadlines. We know that the repatriation of refugees is a marker of subregional stability, and it has now been admitted that some of those who fled the country, including minors, were recruited, trained, supervised and enrolled in anti-Burundi rebel movements, all of it in flagrant violation of the Charter, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region of 24 February 2013. During his visit to Tanzania last week, the President and his counterpart in the United Republic of Tanzania made a heartfelt appeal to refugees to return to their homeland. I should emphasize that they also appealed to organizations dealing with refugees to avoid any deliberate exaggeration of their numbers and to acknowledge that more than 150,000 refugees have already returned to Burundi. In that regard, we call on countries that are hosting refugees — and which I would like to thank, incidentally — and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to cooperate fully in order to facilitate their voluntary return home, since some of them have been held hostage for purely political and business purposes or to maintain or fuel a crisis situation that is increasingly more artificial than real.

In addition to the return of refugees, the two Heads of State exchanged views on strengthening bilateral relations, intensifying trade among the two peoples, security on shared borders and the situation in the region overall. They welcomed the Tanzanian railway project linking Tanzania, Burundi and other countries in the region. The visit also was a testament to the interest that the Heads of State of the region attach to the regional dimension, which is crucial because we have observed in some areas that there is an increasingly wide gap between the positions of some regional actors and the positions of actors in New York. Regional actors need to be listened to. They are the ones who know us and know about our history and culture. They need to have their views heard when decisions are taken, regardless of the context.

With regard to national reconciliation, the Government of Burundi, under the enlightened leadership of President Nkurunziza, set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which, as the Council is aware, marks the final stage in the establishment of the institutions provided for in the 2000 Arusha Agreement. The members of the Commission were called upon to promptly inform the Burundian people of the successes and failures of the past with a view to definitively turning the page on the politico-ethnic antagonisms that have punctuated the dark history of our country, and thereby build a bright future for present and future generations.

As a complement, last week the National Assembly of Burundi adopted a draft law on the functioning of the National Council for National Unity and Reconciliation, which is a very important body. That Council will be composed of seven individuals of integrity and will reconcile the Burundian people — with the aim of unity and equity — and will be at the forefront in upholding the Burundian values of ubuntu, ubushingantahe, hbugabo and hbupfasoni: all positive values inherent in the Burundian people.

At the macroeconomic level, the balance of payments was to an extent impacted by the unilateral suspension of external direct support by some partners. In order for the country to gradually achieve balance, as the Chair of the Burundi configuration mentioned, the retreat held in Bujumbura on 12 July, which included the Government and its multilateral partners and United Nations agencies present in Burundi, recommended the provision of direct budgetary support. The Government and development partners have been invited to engage in a sincere and frank dialogue on this topic with a view to surmounting the obstacles that persist in terms of cooperation between Burundi and some countries.

As far as cooperation with our partners is concerned — and several peakers mentioned this today — we greatly value our partners. Any improvement in our relations with them is most welcome. Representatives are certainly aware that recently the Burundian Government has been working for a resumption of peaceful relations with its partners, and with the United Nations in particular. In order to mend our relations with the United Nations, Burundi expeditiously consented to the visit of the visit of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in late June and early July. During his visit, the Special Envoy, and he can attest to this, enjoyed the legendary hospitality of the Burundian people and the full cooperation of national authorities, which enabled him to carry out his mission in Burundi. We expect that, given his experience in diplomacy, that his reports will uphold the principles, practices and values of the United Nations and, above all, the aspirations of the Burundian people for a political future that suits them and is tailored to their needs. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, who visited Burundi at the same time, benefited from the same degree of cooperation, attention and hospitality, both in Bujumbura and the countryside.

Negotiations on a new, mutually agreed host country agreement will enable cooperation to be resumed between the Government of Burundi and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which many speakers alsoreferred to this at this meeting. That dialogue is under way. We anticipate that we wil meet in the next few weeks to finalize the text to guide our cooperation, which we hope will proceed normally. As I said at the previous meeting (see S/PV.7978), keeping the Office's presence in Burundi is no longer a concern. I assure the Council that that has already been determined, and the Council can count of Burundi's commitment in that regard. The only thing left to do is to finalize the text. We call for flexibility on the part of all parties in order to reach a successful outcome to the discussions. I would point out that these are discussions between two parties.

Similarly, military and human rights observers of the African Union are already deployed on the ground in Burundi and are working freely without

any hindrance. They enjoy the full cooperation of the Burundian Government and all its services, including those of national sovereignty, which certain countries, as representatives are aware, would not extend to foreign observers. With regard to the deployment of additional observers, the obstacles pertain to the African Union and are budgetary in nature. We therefore call on partners to support the African Union to enable it to deploy additional observers. Burundi is very open and the observers currently on the ground are working normally. We will continue to work together to overcome any obstacles in their path in an amicable way.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8014

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8014th meeting
Thursday, 27 July 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Cyprus

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus (S/2017/586)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Cyprus

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus (S/2017/586)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/636, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/586, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I should like to inform the Council that the presidency of the Council has met with the representatives of the parties, who have confirmed that they maintain their well-known positions vis-à-vis the item on the Council's agenda. On the basis of those meetings, with the consent of the members of the Council, the presidency has drawn the conclusion that the Council can proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution before it.

If I hear no objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2369 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation voted in favour of resolution 2369 (2017). I should like to make the following points.

First, Egypt reaffirms its principled position with regard to the question of Cyprus. We call on all parties to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cyprus as an independent and fully sovereign State. We commend the efforts of His Excellency President Anastasiades, including his proposals to pursue negotiations on a sound basis. We stress the great importance of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and urge its continued role in maintaining calm and creating a safe environment in Cyprus, while at the same time ensuring communication between the parties and seeking to relaunch negotiations. The mission should also continue its role as mediator and facilitator. We express our regret about the outcome of the conference on Cyprus. We call for resuming negotiations in order to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement of this issue.

Secondly, Cyprus is a friendly neighbouring country with which we have economic, political, cultural and historical ties. We attach great importance and attention to the question of Cyprus. We look forward to achieving a just and comprehensive settlement of this issue. We emphasize the need to uphold the principles of transparency and inclusiveness by all members of the Security Council in objectively negotiating all relevant draft resolutions.

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.